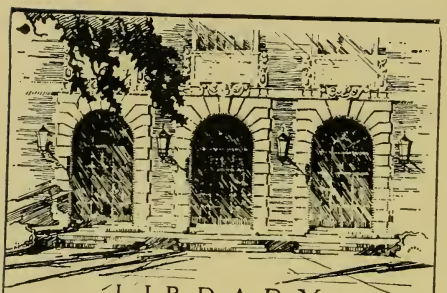
Eliz.th Barlow



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
B89a
v. 2

AT HOME.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY A. J. VALPY, RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

AT HOME.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

ENGLISH FASHIONABLES ABROAD.

Then gay ideas crowd the vacant brain,
While Peers, and Dukes, and all their sweeping train,
And garters, stars, and coronets appear,
And, in soft sounds, "Your Grace" salutes their ear.
POPE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1828.

823
B89a
v. 2

ENGLISH FASHIONABLES AT HOME.

CHAPTER I.

THE ARISTOCRAT AND HIS FAMILY.

At Timon's villa let us pass a day,
Where all cry out, "What sums are thrown away!"
POPE.

LORD TRALEE'S house was exactly the same as a hundred others to be seen in the neighbourhood of London. The outside was large and square, with much pretension, and little accommodation. A grated area surrounded every front; from the different quarters of

which the alternate perfumes were inhaled, of dairy, kitchen, and shoe-hole. The flags on the outer verge of this enclosure showed the same circular stone apertures for the admission of coals that are met with in Portman Square; and the steps to the hall-door were nearly the same in number and dimension as those of his Lordship's house in town.

The internal arrangements were on the same model. A large hall, with a fire-place; a smaller one for the two staircases: four rooms surrounding these. Every body knows the rest of the place.

Out of the four rooms, two were drawing-rooms, thrown together with folding-doors; and furnished, tassel for tassel, the same as nine-tenths of the drawing-rooms in the parish of Mary-le-bone. Even the flowers had a town look; instead of growing with country luxuriance, they were crammed into green-painted wire-baskets; and the very parterres rivalled the shady bouquets of London. The Regent's Park is infinitely more rural.

The whole demesne did not contain many more acres than were occupied by the gardens alone at Ellesmere. But it was designated by the pompous cognomen of "Elm Park;" and boasted of two magnificent entrance lodges; a good deal of invisible paling, painted as conspicuously as possible; a pheasantry; and hot-houses without number: furthermore, it enjoyed the advantage of overlooking five or six neighbouring fish-ponds, which were so fortunately placed, as to appear from the windows as the beautiful windings of a serpentine river: in short, it was altogether what Mr. Brooks would have described as one of the most "compact, commodious, romantic, sumptuous villas to be seen any where within twenty miles of Piccadilly, and fit for the residence of any nobleman or gentleman's family."

Lord Tralee was not at all embarrassed by the limited dimensions of this valuable property: it was situated in an excellent neighbourhood, which particularly recommended it to him and all his family. He had a superb

house in town; and it was understood that his Irish estates were very considerable: nor could this be doubted, as a most respectable man, his agent from Ballyfoyle, came over to him every year; and during his stay at Elm Park, Lord Tralee was so occupied in business, that at those times he never admitted visitors. A singular likeness between this man and his Lordship, encouraged the belief of his being a distant relation: as it was well known that in Ireland the two professions of agents and wine-merchants are followed almost exclusively by gentlemen; so different are the usages of that country from those of England. Lord Tralee never noticed this report. But her Ladyship's Irish footman was turned away for having the impertinence to state that, "although this man's name was O'Berne, he was in truth his Lordship's elder brother; for that was the family name before they christened themselves Fitzosborne."

In this superb mansion, one of the four rooms on the ground-floor was termed Lord

Tralee's study; and its very furniture denoted the immensity of business which claimed his attention. Besides the close mahogany presses with brass letters, which were attached to the walls, the different chairs supported a great variety of official boxes with patent spring-locks, which were appropriated to papers of consequence, and were labelled with those well-known cabalistic characters — "Unanswered letters," "Petitions," "Private correspondence," "Confidential important documents," "Original vouchers," &c. An immense library-table stood at one end of the room, covered with stationery, a copying machine, and piles of letters all regularly docketed. At this table usually was placed his Lordship's private secretary. The interminable "Commons Journals" were numerically arranged on the floor; and his Lordship's own writing-table was covered with small red portfolios, blotting-books, lettered *garde-de-feuilles*, paper-cutters, pen-stands, and all the fopperies of writing. A large basket stood

beside his *fauteuil* to receive loose envelopes; and a smaller one was laid at his right hand, containing the covers waiting for the daily franks.

On the day on which Lionel Fitzosborne was expected to arrive at Elm Park, Lord Tralee was as usual enthroned in state in the midst of this organised confusion. The daily papers were in his hand, and at times he seemed to scan their contents with his customary anxiety; but unwonted abstraction at other times diverted his thoughts, and his eyes wandered as often to the window, or to the valuable watch which was deposited before him. At last the door opened, and Mr. Simmons, the private secretary, made his appearance. He shut the door with a quick motion, and then glided to his seat with noiseless footsteps: the first denoted precipitation; the second caution. Lord Tralee appeared to take no notice of his entrance; but the watch was soon after replaced in his fob, and the newspaper was resumed with less interruption.

Mr. Simmons meantime commenced his daily task. He had been too long in habits of association with Lord Tralee to be communicative by word or look. His figure was short; his hair particularly frizzy. His face looked as if he was constantly conjugating the verb "to smile," either in its past, present, or future tense. But his little grey eyes had a most disagreeable expression, that totally neutralised the otherwise good-humoured rotundity of his visage: his smile, thus accompanied, was converted to a sneer; and where the *tout-ensemble* did not excite contempt, it in some degree inspired aversion.

If Lord Tralee expected the worthy Mr. Simmons would be the first to speak, he miscalculated both the tact and the respect of his minion. In vain his Lordship laid down the newspapers, and walked to the window to intimate that he was disengaged—the hint was useless; and the more apparent his leisure became, the more the zealous secretary looked engrossed by his own occupations.

At last suspense could be endured no longer; and his Lordship roused the slumbering echoes, by saying in a pompous manner, as he drew the ink-stand and blotting-book nearer to him,

"You were late this morning, Mr. Simmons."

"Very sorry, my Lord—could not possibly help it.—Shall I forward the answer to Chelsea to-day, sir?"

"Yes," answered his Lordship impatiently; and to conceal his disappointment, he thrice dipped his pen into his ink-stand, and wrote with infinite circumspection a full-length date on the top of an unsullied sheet of writing-paper.

Another silence ensued: his Lordship had perfectly regained his composure, and in a soothing voice, inquired—"Did you find Willis at home, Mr. Simmons?"

"Yes, my Lord;" and he continued writing.

"And how is he?"

"Very ill, my Lord—can't last long."

"Did you give him my message?"

"Yes, my Lord."

His Lordship perceived that his obstinate secretary had adopted the regular official taciturnity: internally, he wished him in heaven, or its antipodes, but he was too polite to name either extremity; and turning his chair round, with complacency in his countenance and affability in his voice, he again renewed his catechism, taking good care to omit the anti-confidential appellation of "Mr."

"Well, Simmons, and how did he receive it, eh?—does he consent?—I am sure if he refuses *you*, he will be very obstinate indeed: for I must say, Simmons, though I never like paying compliments, I must say you are cleverer at a negociation than any man I ever met with."

"Your Lordship flatters me exceedingly," replied Mr. Simmons, rising from his chair with his smile preterpluperfect: with a steady step, he advanced even so far as to the fire-place; one of his short arms leaned with some inconvenience on the mantle-piece; the other was vigorously stuck against his side, a-kimbo: a

splashed boot was thrust forward in the fourth position, full in Lord Tralee's view; and thus the complacent secretary stood, ready to answer every query. But his Lordship's position still possessed one advantage over that of Mr. Simmons; Lord Tralee sat with his back to the window, whilst the light glared full in his opponent's eyes. Every diplomatist does know, or ought to know, the value of this vantage-ground.

"Your Lordship is very good; but I am afraid, in this one instance, that even *I* shall not succeed."

"What! is Willis still obstinate?"

"Indeed he is, my Lord; he says he cannot in honour do what you desire."

"Oh! curse his honour!—What more does the fool want?—did you offer him the pension?

"I did, my Lord; and even went so far beyond the power I was intrusted with, as to talk of a clerkship in one of the public offices."

"And what on earth can he mean by refusing me?—why, the wretch must starve."

"So I told him, my Lord: four of his children were playing in the next room; the fifth, an infant only three months old, was in the very cradle he was rocking, as I was talking to him; and the eldest boy was gone out with his mother, I believe, to pawn the last book poor Willis has in the world."

"I suppose when it comes to his bed, he will be more reasonable: has he much furniture left?"

"Half-a-dozen chairs and an old sofa, was all I saw."

"And he positively refused to give me a copy of the minister's letter?"

"Positively: he even said if he was to die, he would, at least, leave his children the legacy of an unsullied name: those were his words."

"Pride, sir—ungovernable pride; and both he and his children starving: the man cannot have a grain of feeling in his composition."

"I assure you, my Lord, I talked of his

children to him, till the tears ran down his cheeks; but nothing would move him."

"Well; at least, I suppose he can have no objection to give me back my own instructions to him?"

"There, my Lord, he was equally intractable: he said he kept the Duke's letter for the security of his Grace, and your Lordship's for his own."

"Ay—I always knew the fellow was no fool; but I am much mistaken if I do not conquer him yet."

So saying, Lord Tralee turned to his table, and continued the letter he had previously commenced. His worthy coadjutor did not so immediately relinquish his position: for a moment he gazed on Lord Tralee's well-known countenance, and then, with a short "he-hem," and the smile indefinite, he returned to his daily task, and his usual taciturnity.

Whilst this scene was passing in one part of what had often been described as "a delightful

suite of rooms," the ladies of the family occupied a corner of the smallest drawing-room. Lady Tralee was an enormously large-boned person, with red hair, no particular beauty of feature, and no very intelligible expression of countenance. She always appeared intent on whatever she was doing, but, in the mean time, was by no means so engrossed by her own occupation as to be inattentive to that of others. The eldest Miss Fitzosborne (her brother's favourite, Maria,) inherited the dark hair and eyes of her father, and a slight resemblance to Lionel. Miss Jane, or Jenny, as she was usually called, on the contrary, gloried in the classic locks of her mother; whilst the youngest, Betsy, an awkward growing girl of fourteen,—

> Was just not ugly, and was just not mad.

The whole party altogether presented so decided a contrast to Lionel, that many curious expressions of surprise had not unfrequently been uttered, at the very extraordinary cir-

cumstance of his being so totally unlike all the rest of his family.

There was, however, another individual of the party, whose pretensions to beauty were far less equivocal than those of the three Misses Fitzosborne. Mrs. Smith was dressed in the second mourning of a widow, and nothing could exceed either the simplicity or becomingness of the costume. Her dark hair, in contradiction of all modern fashion, was braided *en Madonne,* and displayed in beautiful contrast the whiteness of her forehead. Her pencilled eyebrows and large black eyes seemed as the last rays of a loveliness that had waned in her complexion, for her cheek was deadly pale, and an air of sickness and debility pervaded every feature. Her air was modest, her manner grave and distant; but when she spoke, which was but seldom, though her accent was marked with a strong Irish intonation, her voice was so sweet, her teeth so beautiful, and her mouth so captivating, that this little defect, or rather peculiarity, was far from unpleasing.

Lady Tralee was lounging in a large chair, reading the last new novel: Miss Fitzosborne was attempting to copy a bad landscape: Jenny was writing letters; Mrs. Smith hemming a muslin frill; and Betsy loitering about from one to the other, occasionally thrusting herself sideways upon one of her sister's chairs, and at other times drumming her fingers on the table, in time to a *sauteuse* she was humming out of tune.

"Upon my word, Maria, that fore-ground looks for all the world like spinach and eggs," observed Betsy.

"Spinach and eggs! and for all the world too! What a vulgar phrase. You will never be *distinguée*," responded Maria.

"Distinguished from you and Jenny, at all events, I hope; la—ra—la—la—la—la—la—" &c. continuing her *sauteuse*.

"You distract my attention," said Lady Tralee. "I desire, Betsy, you will go and practise your music."

"Faith, and that I will."

The look of horror from her sisters, and of indignation from her mamma, was lost upon the young lady. She crept round to the back of Mrs. Smith's chair, and climbing up on it, unceremoniously laid her two hands on her head, and turning it half round, impressed a very affectionate kiss on the pallid cheek, at the same time whispering in her ear—"I think now I have paid them off for you; they'll never talk of your brogue after mine." She then resumed the eternal *sauteuse*, and danced out of the room.

Jenny's letters were finished, and she had time to devote to her present as well as absent friends. "I have been thinking, Maria, what dresses we shall wear to-day. What say you?"

"I mean to go all in white. I am not in high colour to-day," answered Maria, casting a look at the mirror, which of course stood behind a white-marble console, at the end of the room.

"Then, I think, I'll wear my blue *crêpe*

lisse. You know the last time we were dressed alike, that disagreeable Mrs. Mitchell asked us if we bought our silks by the piece."

"If it was not to go to Lady Hauteville's, I would much rather stay at home; it is so provoking to be engaged the very day Lionel is coming home."

"Mrs. Smith, have you dropped anything? Oh! there's your needle. If my brother does not come in time to go with us to dinner, you and Betsy must entertain him till we come back;" and Jenny, as she said this, looked full in Mrs. Smith's face, with a malicious smile gleaming in her own.

"I dare say, Jenny, Mrs. Smith has no wish to entertain gentlemen she is not acquainted with," said Lady Tralee, in a pompous manner. "I hope, Mrs. Smith, if my son does come after we are gone, you will leave him to entertain himself in his father's house, unless you should particularly wish for the pleasure of his company."

"Your Ladyship is very kind," said Mrs.

Smith, in a low tone, and in a few minutes left the room.

"I declare I believe the woman is crying," observed Jenny, with a wide-mouthed stare. "What bad spirits she is always in!"

"You know she never was used to the situation she is now in, and I really do think it must be a dreadful bore to be a lady's companion," observed Maria, as she composedly rubbed some water-colours on her pallet.

"Bless me, I had no idea it was so late! I'll go and have my hair curled. Mamma, at what hour is the carriage ordered?"

"I don't know; but I hope we shall not be so late as the other day; we did not get there till after the soup was removed:" and Lady Tralee yawned long and loud.

"I wonder who we shall meet there. I hope not the Mitchells; they are such standing dishes every where in this neighbourhood," observed Maria.

"Well, I must say I wish we lived at

Wimbledon, or any where within gig distance of town; we might then expect a new face at least once a quarter;" and thus saying, Miss Jenny repaired to the pleasing fatigues of the toilet.

At last the delightful ceremony was finished. The cachemires were folded cornerwise, and laid with a gentle hand over the *gigots bouffants*. The invisible *épingles* were carefully insinuated into the side curls, to prevent the wind discomposing them. The capacious slippers were superadded to the *chaussure* — not to keep the feet warm, but to preserve the white satin shoes unspotted: and thus armed for conquest, the mother and her daughters descended into the hall; the first with a spare pair of gloves in her hands, and the others with French fans, French pocket-handkerchiefs, and artificial bouquets.

It was some time before Lord Tralee made his appearance, for he had rather contracted the habit of keeping his family waiting. But when he did arrive, nothing could exceed the

courtesy with which he apologised for having done so. He only stopped to give his franks to the butler—to whisper one or two messages to his valet, as he gave him his hat and gloves, and to desire the footman to present his kind compliments to his son, whenever he arrived; and then handed the three ladies into the carriage with all the punctiliousness of the *vieille cour*.

On their road to Lord Hauteville's, Lord Tralee was unusually silent; but the young ladies occupied themselves in debating who would, and who would not be there; and as they turned into the magnificent park, they agreed that probably it "would be a mixed party, for there were so many sets in the country, and Lord Hauteville piqued himself on keeping well with all; and besides, it was impossible to have a company really *bien assortie* any where but in town.

On driving up to the hall-door, the young ladies hailed with delight the long range of servants in state liveries, as prognosticating a

dress party. And when they at last reached the drawing-room, the whole family were pleased to see it nearly filled. The ladies rejoiced at the certainty of "new faces," and Lord Tralee at the distinction of being waited for. But his pompous apologies, and hints of indispensable business, were curtailed by Lady Hauteville's condescending assurances, that his Lordship was not the last; and he retired, somewhat mortified, to the circle of gentlemen, who were discussing with much animation the affairs of Spain.

Few moments in life pass more disagreeably than the half-hour before, what is termed, a company dinner. If the lady of the house belongs in the remotest degree to that race of housewives, now indeed nearly extinct, who bestow even a passing thought on their domestic arrangements, the chances are seven to four on her being in the fidgets, in the apprehension that either her dinner or her company will be ready too soon. If on the other hand the guests are not at all *de la même société*, the

agonies undergone by those who are the most modest amongst them, is not to be told. Even, if by some unlooked-for and almost unprecedented stroke of chance, the *convives* have ever been thrown together into the same room before, it is next to a miracle if they do not merely consider it as an arena in which they are assembled "to fight their battles o'er and o'er." Nor is this all. In the changes and chances of this mortal life, as epitomised in the aforesaid half-hour before dinner, we seldom observe people placed as they would have chosen for themselves. Some lady who wears rouge sits facing the light, whilst another with pale *malachite* ornaments is, maugre all her exertions, thrown into shade. A stuttering man may find no other auditor but one stone deaf, who, out of good-natured anxiety to comprehend him, makes him repeat every thing twice over. And a squire, who has ridden five miles for an appetite, may lose all the fruits of his labour by his unpleasant vicinity to a cigar-fancier.

These observations applied in some little degree to the party assembled at Lady Hauteville's. For the Tralee family were scarcely acquainted with even the names of above half the company. Ample time was however afforded to them for a full survey of their new associates, and the young ladies diligently improved the opportunity.

CHAPTER II.

THE DINNER PARTY.

With a new-fashion'd hall, built where the old one stood,
Hung round with new pictures that do the poor no good,
With a fine marble chimney, wherein burn neither coals nor wood,
And a new smooth shovel-board, whereon no victuals e'er stood—
Like a young courtier of the king's.

OLD SONG.

ALTHOUGH Lord and Lady Tralee had visited for some years at the really magnificent mansion of Lord Hauteville, it could scarcely be said they were thoroughly acquainted; for the great dissimilarity of characters and pursuits between these noble personages had proved an insuperable bar to intimacy.

Lord Hauteville was lord-lieutenant of the county, and of one of the oldest families in England. In former times, before such places as Elm Park had sprung up like mushrooms in his neighbourhood, his ancestors had held woods and manors in their own hands, which engrossed the whole country for many miles round. But as London gradually grew to its present circumference, and the value of the lands in its vicinity proportionably increased, by degrees the possessions of the Hauteville family passed into other hands, partly to repair the extravagancies of some preceding viscounts, and partly to enable the present possessor to cope with the daily increasing extravagancies of *les nouveaux riches*, by whom he was surrounded.

His Lordship had been much in the confidence of the late King, and having passed all his younger days at court, still retained in his manners much of the graceful solemnity which distinguished the nobles who were then his cotemporaries. He was a politician, rather by

birth-right than choice: for being acknowledged by all parties as the head of the nobility in that part of England, he felt he had little to gain for himself; and neither his tastes or talents tended towards that most difficult of all sciences, the art of government. He was still sufficiently a courtier to feel it incumbent on him to pay his annual visit to London; where, as in all other places, he was universally looked up to as a man of sound good sense, and of pleasing, though reserved deportment. But in the country, he was still more popular; and as a good landlord, an active magistrate, and a friendly neighbour, his private character was more revered than either his rank, power, or ancestry.

Lady Hauteville was of a character similar to her Lord's in all the more sterling qualities. In talents, she probably was his superior; but her manners were by no means so prepossessing. She usually took little pains either to conceal her own aristocratic pride, or to conciliate the affections of others; and the caus-

tic tone of her conversation, and occasionally the sharpness of her satire, rendered her generally more feared than loved. In the country, therefore, where the ladies she visited were brought more immediately in contact with her, she was generally disliked, though still more universally courted; whilst in town, where all individuality is lost, the magnificence of her establishment, the celebrity of her parties, and above all the difficulty of being admitted on her visiting list, rendered her one of the reigning planets in the hemisphere of fashion.

When Lady Tralee, by whom few things passed unnoticed, had sufficiently admired Lady Hauteville's emeralds, she turned her eyes slowly round the room to continue her investigation of the company. On the couch beside the hostess, sat another lady, who was as great a contrast to Lady Hauteville as could well be imagined. The Marchioness of Coleraine had been a beauty, and still considered herself a wit. In both characters, her power and influence had once been so great, that she

was suspected of having interfered even with legislation. But her knowledge of the world exceeded all her other acquirements: she knew that a day must come to all, when beauty is no longer loved, and talents are no longer feared; and, to provide with cautious anticipation against that day of sorrow, she had within the last few years announced herself as patroness of all fatherless beauties, or city heiresses; and her levees are in consequence as crowded as ever, and her visiting-book and opera-box equally full to overflowing.

She had within the last few days arrived on a visit to Lord and Lady Hauteville; and brought with her, as usual, an almost endless train of followers. Not to speak of her husband, who, poor and good-humoured as ever, went punning on without once thinking of debts or creditors. She was accompanied by a very pretty, well-dressed, rich and foolish girl, whom the Marchioness had introduced last spring, and intended for her son, Lord Oporto, who was also of this party, but had not yet made

up his mind on the subject of Miss Flinn; or, to use his own words, "he had not yet got over her name."

Meantime, a thin, near-sighted, pale-visaged, travelled and extravagant baronet was endeavouring to take advantage of Lord Oporto's indecision, and was assiduously paying court to the young lady on the very next chair to Miss Jenny Fitzosborne, who was quietly engaged in getting by heart every sentence uttered by the accomplished Sir William Mathison. Lady Coleraine, strange to say, had also brought him with her—on the twofold calculation, first, that his *empressement* might rouse the apathy of Lord Oporto; or, secondly, that if it failed to do so, and that Sir William won the prize, he would for ever consider himself indebted for it to her Ladyship's generosity.

Lady Tralee's further investigation was for a moment suspended, by hearing Lord Hauteville say to the Viscountess—"Do we expect any more to-day, except Mr. Russel, my love?"

"Certainly: you forget Lady Emily Darnton, my Lord; and as Mr. Darnton is gone to York, it is impossible to guess how many she may bring with her, besides Mr. Bell."

"What, her Ladyship is still unlimited in her patronage?" observed Lady Coleraine, looking very arch, as she burst into a loud laugh: "*Et qui donc, ma chère, est ce Monsieur Bell?—où est-ce qu'elle l'a pris?*" continued she, in a loud whisper to Lady Hauteville, and a most intelligent glance at the same time to the Viscount.

"Lady Emily is much altered since you knew her," answered Lady Hauteville; adding, in a decided tone, which rather forbade further interrogatories—"Mr. Bell is her moral agent." At the same moment the door opened, and Lady Emily herself made her appearance; followed not only by the moral Mr. Bell, but by a very handsome, well-dressed, fashionable-looking young man, of grave countenance, but brilliant eyes, whom she introduced to the Viscountess by the name of Mr. Deacon.

"You must have heard of him I am sure, my dear friend," added she; deliberately laying Lady Hauteville's hand between both of hers, as if to detain her, whilst her sweet voice seemed of sufficient power to need no other accessory. "He has just returned from Ireland: you must have read his discourses—the papers were filled with nothing else. Oh! he is a delightful man!—I wish you had heard his exhortation last night." But Lady Emily was interrupted in her praises of Mr. Deacon, as she was obliged to return the bows and curtsies of half the company.

"What a fine woman Lady Emily Darnton is for her age," whispered Lord Coleraine to Lady Tralee: "we may call her a *Bell* yet;" and his witty Lordship nodded significantly in explanation of his own pun; but Lady Tralee's thoughts were otherwise engrossed.

"Who is that Mr. Deacon?" inquired she; "I think I know his face."

"Oh, no doubt, you have often met him at Lord Rumford's.—*On dit*, that Lady Margaret,

his second daughter, is to be married to him, and that they are going on a missionary expedition to Africa: but I think it is impossible to be true—*Nihil vidi.*"

In Lord Coleraine's mania for punning, he totally forgot he was talking to a lady; but he escaped wonderfully well, for Lady Tralee exclaimed, "Really!" with a most agreeable smile; and his Lordship believed she both heard and understood every word. The fact was not so, however: for, meantime, her eyes had wandered to the far side of the room, where she observed a lady whom she did not know, and who had monopolized the attention of nearly all the men in the room. She was not young, though still handsome, with one of the most intelligent countenances that ever gave index to a well-cultivated mind. A very valuable and beautiful shawl was so wrapped round her slender figure, that no part of her dress was visible, except her resplendent ear-rings, and an equally dazzling tiara. Her manner was too *posée*—too *prononcée* to be called flirting; but she was

keeping up a very animated and apparently interesting discussion (if not absolutely argument) on the war in the Morea: giving her opinions very authoritatively, in an accent decidedly Scotch, but an idiom compounded of every European language.

"Who is that lady?—is she a foreigner?" inquired Lady Tralee, though still in a whisper.

"Almost—But does your Ladyship forget the Duchess of Chester?

"Oh, dear, so it is! I declare I did not remember her: when did she come from abroad?"

"The week after her husband set out on his embassy. They say they passed on the road."

"I do recollect now, I heard something of their being invited together to some fine dinner, and that she carried it off admirably."

Lady Tralee's catechism was again interrupted, by Lord Hauteville bringing up a young man, who had just entered the room, to be presented to the Viscountess. Nothing

could exceed the urbanity and kindness with which Mr. Russel was received by her Ladyship: her manner was far different from the haughty condescension with which she sometimes received her guests, and there was a cordiality in her smile that was even still more unusual. Mr. Russel, however, occupied but a few moments of her attention. He seemed to thank her in a modest, but elegant manner; and then stepping a pace or two back, he retired from the circle which had accidentally been formed in front of Lady Hauteville.

"How do, Russel?"—"Glad to see you, Russel!"—"When did you come down, Russel?"—such were the greetings he received on every side. Lord Tralee went up to him to shake him cordially by the hand; but the Duchess beckoning to him with her finger, made room for him on the couch on which she was sitting—an invitation he seemed delighted to accept; for, making three long strides on tip-toe, he glided up to her, and gathering the flaps of his coat into the smallest compass possible, he

slipped into the corner she had left for him, then leaning back with his head against the wall, deliberately passed the palm of his hand over his raven locks, and seemed delighted to escape from the honours of notoriety.

Every body knew this was the famous Mr. Russel: the hero of the Alton party—the exquisite of every London party—lawyer—legislator—poet—dandy—the best story-teller—the most patient auditor: not to know Mr. Russel, was to argue yourself unknown. But dinner was announced, and Lord Hauteville advanced to take the Duchess of Chester from so dangerous a vicinity.

A state dinner is the *ne plus ultra* of formality, especially since round tables are come into fashion, for they are always in extremes: in small parties, a round table promotes intimacy; but in large ones it increases ceremony, as every body feels himself *vis-à-vis* to the whole company. Furthermore, Lord Hauteville's dinners always are stately; and this day the company were even more reserved than usual.

Mr. Bell, who had prepared a long grace for the occasion, came into the room last, with his eyes fixed on the ground; he was not therefore aware that the whole company were seated, and that even Lady Emily Darnton was helped to soup. He continued standing, in silent preparation, for about a minute, when Lady Hauteville at last noticing him, called out in a tone, between civility and command, to request he would be seated, which so electrified him, that he found himself installed on his chair, before he was aware of the circumstance: meanwhile Mr. Deacon, with more tact, had already followed the example of their Lady-patroness, and was deeply engaged in discussing some incomparable *soupe sautée.*

When the sound of Lady Hauteville's voice died away, all was silence: it was not the custom of that house to speak aloud at large dinners, and few indeed had courage even to address their next neighbour *sotto voce.* The usual helps to conversation were wanting *dans les comestibles.* For all the *entremets,*

petites entrées, and *hors-d'œuvres*, were handed round; and the butler was so unremittingly attentive in presenting the wines, that scarcely any excuse was left for any extra challenges in that way; or if made, they were effected only by private signals or embassies, conveyed through the supernumerary servants. No noises were heard, except a confused murmur of occasional whispering, and the sharp grating of the knives on the silver plates. A pair of creaking shoes, or the explosion of a bottle of cider, would have been hailed with delight by two-thirds of the company.

Lord Coleraine's love of punning was totally subdued, or rather suspended; but perhaps this miraculous effect might have been traced to a combination of causes: for Lord Hauteville's cook was infinitely superior to any the poor Marquis could afford to keep, and he was fully determined to act on Milton's hint—

> And if I give thee honour due,
> Mirth admit me of thy crew.

The Duchess of Chester was the only person who followed Dr. Samuel Johnson's recommendation, "to talk." But she addressed herself exclusively to Lord Hauteville (which, by the way, rather impeded his attention to his other guests); and however impressive was her Grace's manner, or however changeful the expression of her countenance, the rest of the company could not hear a word she said—not even the attentive Lady Tralee, as the Duchess turned her back on her.

At length, after innumerable unsuccessful attempts, Lady Hauteville caught her Grace's eye; and a simultaneous movement amongst the ladies showed how anxiously they had all been, likewise, on the watch, for the dismission of the congress.

As soon as coffee was dispatched, the Duchess retired to her favourite couch, on which she deliberately stretched herself at full length, observing, "Abroad we all take a *siesta* —so pray don't mind me."

The other ladies followed her injunctions.

The two Miss Fitzosbornes drew their chairs close to Miss Flinn's, in order to debate upon beaux and ball-dresses. Lady Hauteville placed herself on a couch, throwing her arm negligently over one end of it, and looking *tant soit peu* bored. Lady Emily Darnton, in a most melodious voice, was recapitulating the heads of one of Mr. Deacon's discourses; whilst Lady Tralee was listening at once to both parties with magnanimous attention. Lady Coleraine, who was not unused to *les après-dîners* at Hauteville, had taken this favourable opportunity of retiring to her own room; when having calculated to a nicety the duration of the Duchess's *siesta*, and the gentlemen's stay in the dining-parlour, she re-entered the room, and drew her chair in full front of the three aforesaid ladies, under pretence of conversing with them, but in reality to break a circle, which was a figure to which she had often expressed a rooted antipathy.

"You will find it, I assure you, written in the fourth ——." Such was Lady Emily's

concluding sentence, when Lady Coleraine interrupted her.

"Talking of writing, my dear Lady Emily, puts me in mind that I have just received such a long letter from your friend Lady Harriet Moreton."

Lady Emily was about to disclaim any particular friendship; but Lady Hauteville instantly saw the advantage of this seasonable interruption.

"And, poor thing, how does she like —— shire?" tenderly inquired the Viscountess. "She must be *ennuyée à la mort*, I should think, at Broomhill Barracks."

"I assure you she writes in high spirits. She has met with two or three inestimable originals in that country. There is one family, Weldon I think the name, so very good, that Lady Harriet has some intention of bringing them out on the London boards next spring, if she can get anybody to stand godmother to them."

"Lady Harriet has such charming spirits:

she is a delightful correspondent," pompously observed Lady Tralee.

"And, Lady Emily, I have something to tell you which I know will amuse *you*," continued the *indomptable* Marchioness. "Do you know Lord Calvert is come back? and she has got up a chicken flirtation with him, *pour passer le temps*." Lady Emily fanned herself; and Lady Hauteville half smiled, as she observed—"I am afraid that won't do. Lord Calvert is a remarkably fine young man—indeed, I know few like him—we saw a good deal of him in Germany last summer; but I am afraid even Lady Harriet Moreton, with all her attractions, will find it difficult to make a conquest of him."

"Lord Calvert has at all events made his escape for the present," said Lady Tralee. "My son and he left Ellesmere together."

"*A propos*, where *is* that irresistible son of yours, Lady Tralee?" inquired the Marchioness with eagerness. "Do tell him he shall positively not have his old share in my opera-box, unless he comes to ask for it in person."

Just then the groom of the chambers announced tea; and the Duchess, whose sleep had only lasted during Lady Emily Darnton's harangue, now willingly led the way into the saloon, where tea was spread *en buffet*, with all the modern appendages of damask table-linen, and pretty *femmes-de-chambre*.

Almost at the same instant the gentlemen made their *entrée* from the dinner-room.

The Marquis of Coleraine and Lord Hauteville were so much engrossed by their discussion upon planting, that they mechanically walked up to the hearth-rug, and stood with their backs to the chimney, totally unmindful of there being no fire. Lord Oporto, and two or three other young men, strolled into the billiard-room. The Duchess, as usual, attracted the majority of those who remained, and entered into a long *comparaison* with Sir William Mathison between the pleasures and advantages of the two watering-places—Ems and Carlsbadt. Messieurs Bell and Deacon stood both upright on either side of Lady Emily Darnton, in total silence. (Lord Coleraine af-

terwards made many good puns about her Ladyship's Belfry.) The three young ladies were totally unattended to in the back-ground; and Lady Coleraine was indefatigable in her inquiries about "that dear, pleasant creature, Lionel Fitzosborne," when Lord Tralee, who had never diverged from the side of Mr. Russel, approached the table along with him, and formally presented him to his lady wife; adding with much emphasis—"Mr. Russel is just returned from Alton Forest, my love."

"A fine place, is it not, Mr. Russel?" asked her Ladyship, who could think of nothing else to say.—"Had you much company?"

"We had a good deal of occasional company; but Mr. Fielding was the only person who remained long with us. You know Mr. Fielding, of course, my Lord?"

Lord Tralee was spared the mortification of confessing that he was scarcely even acquainted with Lord Alton, by the carriages being announced. Lady Emily Darnton's was first; and though Lady Hauteville pressed her to

stay, and make up the party of sixpenny *cornette,* she positively refused, with as much expression of horror as politeness would permit. Her two beaux were waiting to attend her Ladyship. "Quite pastor—al," was Lord Coleraine's parting speech. Mr. Deacon had the honour of arranging her shawl, as being most expert in those things; but Mr. Bell, however, would not relinquish his prescriptive right to offer her his arm; and thus escorted, she took leave of the company.

Lady Tralee's carriage was next: their adieus were even shorter; and as his Lordship's blood-horses stepped remarkably fast, they had the pleasure of nearly overturning the quiet trio, as they passed them in the avenue.

"Well, I am glad it is over!" observed Maria, after a long yawn: "I hate those fine stupid dinners of all things!"

"I am sure it is not worth going to dress in the middle of the day to come home in the middle of the night," rejoined Miss Jenny.

"I wonder where Lady Hauteville got those

assiettes montées," said Lady Tralee: "I think them much handsomer than those Wadd sent us. Don't you think so, my Lord?" but Lord Tralee was thinking of something else.

In about five minutes, Lady Tralee began again. "We must soon return the invitation to Lord and Lady Hauteville, my dear; and I am sure I don't know who we shall get to meet them. We don't owe any dinners now, except to the Mitchells; and last year they dined twice with us to their once."

"I hate keeping debtor and creditor accounts of dinner-parties," replied Lord Tralee, somewhat petulantly: "and we must have Mr. Russel before he leaves the country; his acquaintance may be of the utmost importance to Lionel—we must cultivate him."

Silence was renewed. Lord Tralee looked out of the carriage-window, although it was so dark he could only see the hedge by the side of the road, as the lamp of the carriage passed it. The young ladies went to sleep; and Lady Tralee thought only of *assiettes montées* and

her new Sièvre ice-pails. At length they reached Elm Park in safety; and hearing that Mr. Fitzosborne was not only arrived, but actually gone to bed two hours before, they also retired for the night, "to sleep—perchance to dream."

CHAPTER III.

MANŒUVRES.

———— Methinks I am not wrong'd,
Nor is aught, if from the censuring world
I can but hide it.—Reputation!
Thou art a word—no more.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

THE next morning, the ladies of the party at Elm Park were much inclined to repose themselves after the fatigue of Lord Hauteville's dinner, as they were not by any means averse to that or any other excuse for keeping up London hours in the country. But Lord Tralee was impatient to enter, as he said, on

business with his son; and therefore sent a message round the family, requesting to have breakfast as soon as possible.

Lady Tralee was the first who obeyed the summons; and on entering the room, she found none of the others had yet made their appearance, except Mrs. Smith and Lionel, who of course rose to receive his mother with all the affectionate alacrity she expected. As soon as the welcome salutation was given and received, Lady Tralee observed to her son—

"Fitzosborne, this is Mrs. Smith—the lady you may remember Lady Harriet Moreton wrote to me about: I suppose, however, your acquaintance is already commenced. Did you see Lionel last night, Mrs. Smith?" and her Ladyship made this interrogatory with a very inquisitive glance.

"I had not that pleasure," replied Mrs. Smith, in her usual mild voice, as she continued her daily task of making tea.

"I acknowledge our acquaintance is not yet a day old; but I hope Mrs. Smith already

allows me to lay claim to her friendship," said Fitzosborne.

This remark covered poor Mrs. Smith's pallid cheek once more with roseate blushes; nor were they diminished when Miss Betsy burst into the room, exclaiming, with a loud laugh, "Well, Lionel, I hope your *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Smith is over at last. I have been practising for above an hour, I am sure; and after that, I listened at the door, and heard every word you said."

Mrs. Smith scalded her fingers with the boiling water, and the pain caused the tears to run down her cheeks; but she said nothing. Lionel, shocked at his sister's want of decorum, uttered an involuntary "Impossible!" but as he turned round to expostulate with her, he saw the playful girl eagerly trying to catch his eye, whilst, hitting her fore-finger against the side of her nose, she gave him private intimation that she was only, as she termed, trying to plague Mrs. Smith a little for having kept her so long at her piano-forte.

Lord Tralee now entered the room; and the conversation turned on indifferent subjects, till breakfast was concluded: immediately after which, he and Lionel retired to his Lordship's study, where they remained in close conference for some hours.

In the *confidential communications* which Lionel frequently held with his father, it was difficult to say which proved himself the greatest proficient in the art of diplomacy. Each had much to learn from the other;—of information that could only be extorted by an appearance of the most unreserved confidence. Whilst as each was conscious of having still more to conceal, they involuntarily entertained a slight tincture of reciprocal suspicion; and were equally on the alert to discover the other's secret, and to maintain their own. One difference, however, was manifest between them. If, in this collision of talent, Lord Tralee acquired even a temporary superiority, it excited feelings compounded of fear and jealousy in the mind of his son: whereas the more Lionel

proved himself a consummate politician, the more proud and gratified were the feelings of his father. Fitzosborne believed that the firmest hold he had on his Lordship's affection, was the certainty of his co-operation being essential to him. Lord Tralee flattered himself that the more decided his son's abilities were proved, the more advantageous would it be to both. But in these different estimates, the same principles were acted upon by each; namely, a cool, deliberate calculation of self-interest.

The secret which Lord Tralee now in the most pompous manner confided to his son, was little more than what Lionel already had divined. The execution of some important financial arrangement had been confided to Lord Tralee by the actual minister; and his Lordship saw no good reason why, if he was to take any part whatever in the measure, he should not also participate in its advantages: for if the sum required by the minister found its way into his Majesty's Treasury undiminished, it was in Lord Tralee's estimation quite

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

immaterial whether that sum was or was not the precise amount originally received from the individuals from whom it was collected.

Mr. Willis was the person who had been employed by Lord Tralee in this transaction. By a strange fatality, partly attributable to over-eagerness on the part of his Lordship, and still more to unusual negligence on the part of his secretary, this Mr. Willis had become the possessor of two valuable documents; namely, the original order to Lord Tralee, and his authority for that order being exceeded: nor could all Mr. Simmonds's exertions induce him to relinquish these papers, which had now become of infinite importance: for the individuals from whom the money had been extorted, had by some unknown means discovered a clue to Lord Tralee's manœuvres. Commissioners of inquiry were threatened; and even a bill was talked of, to be brought on in the House of Commons, unless the matter was arranged before the ensuing meeting of Parliament. To refund the money, would bring double ruin on

Lord Tralee; and therefore no alternative remained but to turn out the present minister, when of course all possible blame might with safety be imputed to him; or, what was apparently less difficult, to vindicate both parties by throwing the whole odium upon the unfortunate Willis, who was pronounced by every body to be a dying man.

It thus had become a matter of vital importance to Lord Tralee to ascertain how far it was desirable to conciliate the present minister; or, on the contrary, how far it might prove advantageous, at once to abandon him to his fate; or even anticipate it, by giving him up as a propitiatory offering to Lord Alton. On this point, the advice and information of Lionel was most desirable; and the chances for or against that nobleman's taking office were anxiously debated. His name naturally led to the mention of Julia Fielding. With inimitable address, Lionel contrived to lay before his father the infinite advantage which a match with her would prove to any man. Her pre-

sent large fortune as Mr. Fielding's only child —the possibility of its increase, should her father succeed to the earldom—her high connexions—the intimacy subsisting between the rector and his cousin; all these points were in turn dexterously presented to the delighted imagination of Lord Tralee; whilst Lionel so perfectly assumed an air of indifference on the subject, and even professed so decided an antipathy to the shackles of matrimony, that at last Lord Tralee was brought to the desired point of soliciting, as a personal favour to himself, that Fitzosborne would at least "reflect a little upon a measure," which in truth was never a moment absent from his thoughts.

As it was agreed by these noble coadjutors, that it was good policy to pay court to Mr. Russel, "decidedly the most rising man of the Alton party," Lord Tralee and Lionel agreed to call upon him that morning, and accordingly they proceeded on horseback to Lord Hauteville's. Unfortunately, Mr. Russel, accompanied by Lord Oporto, Sir William Mathison,

and Lord Hauteville, had gone out to ride with the Duchess of Chester and Miss Flinn; but hearing that Lady Hauteville and Lady Coleraine were at home, they entered the library.

Lady Hauteville was standing on the threshold of the conservatory, bearing in her hands and dress evident proofs of her late employment there: a little untrimmed straw bonnet, of coarser material than those worn by her own charity children, was carelessly placed, or rather thrown, upon a French cap, which was in itself a *chef-d'œuvre* from the hands of Madame de la Roche Aigremont: a black stuff apron covered a Moravian gown; and gloves, resembling gauntlets in size, were graced with some of the choicest specimens of her rarest exotics. She was talking to old Admiral Gunner, whilst Lady Coleraine was busily employed in transcribing epigrams out of Lady Hauteville's album.

If Lady Hauteville received Lord Tralee with politeness, and his son even more kindly, the Marchioness unreservedly detailed her

genuine delight at Lionel's visit, which she frankly attributed to herself, and shaking him cordially with both hands, almost before he had time to take off his gloves, "Now do tell me, Fitz, what have you been about for this last century? Let me see—why it is above ten months since I last saw you.—What did you do at Paris last winter?—I am told it was very so so."

"Much as usual:—the French always attainable—the English always exclusive—our ambassadress abused by those whom she did not invite, and bored to death by those she did."

"Did you happen to meet Captain Tiger of the navy there, sir?" roared out Admiral Gunner, in a voice of thunder.—"He is an old ship-mate of mine, and as good a fellow as ever walked a quarter-deck."

"Not to my knowledge, sir," answered Lionel, with a distant bow.

"Ecod, you could not mistake him; the left side of his chin was shot off under Lord Nelson,

and he squints a little with his right eye—an excellent fellow as ever lived."

"If I mistake not, he has two very tall daughters, very like him?" replied Lionel, in his usual mellifluous voice.

"Ay, I knew you must have met them at Paris; they were there all the winter."

"I do recollect seeing them more than once."

"To be sure you do. What the devil have we got a jack-sprat of an ambassador at Paris for now-a-days, but to do the honours to those brave men who have helped to lick the *parlez-vous* fore and aft?—Why, sir, my friend Tom Tiger worked his way in the service; he was seventeen years a lieutenant, and was in more actions, I'll venture to say, sir, than you have been in ball-rooms;—an't I right, my Lady?"

"I am sure you are, my dear Admiral," replied Lady Hauteville, laughing; for the worthy veteran who addressed her was one of her declared favourites.

Lady Coleraine was delighted with this colloquy. "You might be in London an age,

without seeing such an original," whispered she to Lionel; and then added aloud, "I agree with you, Admiral, the figures you have described Captain Tiger and his daughters are the very thing for our ambassador."

"Did you often meet them at his Excellency's," inquired Lord Tralee pompously, for he saw the conversation was *au gré* of all.

"Every Sunday morning," replied Lionel gravely.

"Whew!" ejaculated the Admiral, stepping forward full in front of Fitzosborne—"why, you don't mean to say the English ambassadress gives parties of a Sunday morning, and that my old ship-mate, Tom Tiger, goes to them?"

"I assure you, Admiral," said Lady Coleraine, with infinite gravity, "I have seen near two hundred people, nay more, assembled of a Sunday morning in the very room at the ambassador's which I had supped in the night before, with all the wax candles in the candelabras."

"And Tom Tiger there?—No, no, my Lady,

begging your pardon, I'd as soon believe the spritsail-topsail yard would be found troised across the jib-boom. Why, Tom would be as much cast away there as I should be if I was landlocked at the north pole—ha! ha! ha!—thank ye, my Lady, thank ye; but we water-birds are wary."

"But, my dear Admiral," said Lady Hauteville, as soon as she could speak for laughing, "the place Lady Coleraine and Mr. Fitzosborne are speaking of, is in fact the ambassador's chapel; it is used for divine service every Sunday morning."

"Whew!" again groaned the Admiral, "and for suppers the night before.—Smart work that—canister shot and ball cartridge. Well, I'd rather keep my girls safe in dock than take them that way into the enemy's port, all standing.—Why, the floating chapel aboard the hulk is better than that."

The Admiral's harangue was interrupted by the entrance of the Duchess of Chester, who, in fact, was the person he was waiting to see;

for her Grace's father had been his most intimate friend, and he felt a partiality for her which was gratefully returned on her part.

She was not, however, so much engrossed by the old man as not immediately to recognise Lionel. She had a thousand questions to ask him, not only about himself, but about Lord Calvert, who had been much with her at Rome. His name was equally interesting both to Lady Hauteville and the Marchioness, who drew their seats into a little coterie, of which Fitzosborne was the centre; although, this time, his chief attraction consisted in his having been in connexion with a man whom he still had the audacity to call his friend.

Meantime, the Admiral fell to the share of Lord Tralee, who talked learnedly of seventy-fours cut down, and delighted his auditor by his perfect knowledge of the Bay of Algiers. Still, however, his Lordship's eyes and ears were equally on the look-out for Mr. Russel; and it was with visible disappointment he heard from Lord Oporto, who soon after entered,

that his new friend had rode to the petty sessions at N. with Lord Hauteville.

"You were very right not to come with us, Lady Hauteville—monstrous hot—Do let me have some hock and soda water," observed Lord Oporto, ringing the bell, and at the same time turning his back to the Viscountess, so as to be totally ignorant whether he was interrupting her or not.

"Oporto, here's Mr. Fitzosborne," exclaimed Lady Coleraine, with that slight lisp which she always affects when she is particularly pleased.

The two young men seemed rejoiced to meet —Fitzosborne had a good deal to ask him about the Derby, and this put an end to what he deemed the interminable queries about Lord Calvert.

Sir William Mathison, who had come in with Lord Oporto, considered himself equally at home in discussing a horse-race or describing the Pantheon; he was, therefore, glad to take this opportunity of making an acquaintance with Mr. Fitzosborne, of whom he had

often heard, and of whom he had, meanwhile, taken an ample and satisfactory survey through his spy-glass.

It was, however, time for Lord Tralee and Fitzosborne to take leave, as it was an invariable maxim with them never to stay too long in any company.

"What a difference there is between Fitzosborne and the rest of the family!" observed the Duchess, as soon as the door was shut: "the girls are dreadful *seccatrici*."

"*Parevano orribili anche a me*," rejoined Sir William, leaning over the back of a *fauteuil*, which he carefully balanced without the support of its front legs, at the same time staring in the Duchess's face.

"If they were even good girls," said Lady Hauteville.

"Or good-looking," said Lord Oporto.

"Or good-natured," said the Marchioness.

"One hardly knows what to do with them in town," observed Lady Hauteville, "for one can't absolutely cut them, on ac-

count of their father—and they do fill up a room so."

"They are seen every where and liked no where," rejoined Lord Oporto, yawning.

"I am sure if I was their mother," continued Lady Hauteville, "I'd give up the point with them—they look uglier every year: I only asked them to my crush parties last spring; but I declare next year I must restrict them to a back seat at my concerts, and give them my tickets to the ancient music to keep the peace."

"Well, after all, their brother is so delightful, that even they may be tolerated for his sake," said Lady Coleraine.

"*Il est beau comme le jour,*" replied the Duchess.

"But after all, how could he acquire such perfect manners?" observed Lady Hauteville; "assuredly not in the Tralee school."

"Oh! you know Lady Harriet Moreton was his mistress," replied Lady Coleraine; whilst a stifled "Oh fie!" from the ladies,

and a loud laugh from the gentlemen, concluded the commentaries.

Meanwhile Lord Tralee and his son slowly sauntered homewards, renewing in some degree the conversation of the morning. Lionel informed his father that it was his intention only to stay a day or two, as he was engaged on a grousing party. Lord Tralee, therefore, seized with more avidity the opportunity of expatiating on the propriety of cultivating Lord Alton's acquaintance through the medium of Mr. Fielding; and as usual, his Lordship did not conclude his morning's ride till an hour after the time at which dinner was ordered.

The evening was insufferably stupid. Lord Tralee was dull and dignified—the Misses Fitzosborne sung their best songs to enliven their brother; but he recollected having listened to Julia Fielding, and was abstracted and melancholy. Betsy was half cross, because her favourite Mrs. Smith had told her she would not come down stairs, as she did not like to interrupt a family party; and therefore the

young lady, having plagued them all as much as she dared, magnanimously bounced out of the room, to have a game of romps with the still-room maid.

Lady Tralee wanted to talk to Lionel about Mrs. Smith, who had been recommended to her by Lady Harriet Moreton; but he answered her *à tort et à travers*, and did not seem to attend to a word she said. She could not talk to her daughters, for they were in the middle of a *bravura*. She dared not to speak to her husband, for his Lordship seemed in one of those humours which Betsy called his "sulk meditative." Her Ladyship therefore, as a last resource, took to yawning; and the hint being gradually followed by the whole company, the family party was dispersed at an hour awfully unfashionable.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET.

The slanting sun, reluctant to bereave
Thy woods of beauty, fondly seem'd to leave
Smiles of the softest light that slowly past
In bright succession o'er each charm thou hast
Thyself so oft admired.

TIGHE'S POEMS.

A VERY pressing note from Lady Hauteville induced Lionel to dine there the following day; and at Hauteville, Lionel was in truth much more at home than at Elm Park. He was one of their own set; and though he was by no means so great a favourite with the Viscount and Lady Hauteville as with their

guests, yet nobody knew better than her Ladyship did, the value of having such a person in a country party. His talents seemed to multiply with the occasions for their display. He could talk either sense or sentiment to the Duchess—repeat all the *commérage* both of London and Paris to the Marchioness. He was as much in the diplomatic set in town as Lady Hauteville herself — knew "the Magistrate's Guide" as well or better than his host—had been as much abroad as Sir William Mathison, and as often at Tattersall's as Lord Oporto. He could look unutterable things to Miss Flinn; and give to what he did utter, a surreptitious value from the insinuating softness of his voice and manner. But Mr. Russel was his aim, and in some degree his victim.

A marked diversity, and at the same time similarity existed, between the pursuits and characters of these two young men; so much so, that they were generally the subjects of *comparaison* to all their acquaintances: the

result was, that Fitzosborne was the favourite with strangers, and with the world in general: Russel was held higher by those who looked beyond the surface. Fitzosborne had more talent—Russel more learning; the first was more elegant—the last more fashionable. Both were naturally eloquent, and both trained to the business of public life. But Russel confined his labours to the closet, Lionel pursued his objects in the ball-room. The one sought society merely as a *délassement;* the other courted it as the most powerful lever to his own elevation.

It was, on the present occasion, Fitzosborne's object to cultivate Mr. Russel's acquaintance, as a preliminary to future intimacy; and in this he fully gained his point, for Mr. Russel was amused by the versatility of his talents, and surprised by their brilliancy. It was also an object with Lionel to learn through him what were Lord Alton's views; and this too he partly effected, although Mr. Russel cautiously avoided mentioning any particulars

which were not in general circulation. Yet it was of much importance to Fitzosborne to ascertain how much of those general reports were to be relied on; he therefore appeared to Mr. Russel to know nearly as much of Lord Alton's intentions, as he did himself; and thereby succeeded in ascertaining that overtures had certainly been made to the Earl, which were not yet finally rejected.

Fitzosborne having thus so well turned to account his short visit to his father, had no further motive for its prolongation. There was so little similitude between the refinement of his tastes and manners with the attempt at fashion which distinguished those of his mother and sisters, that association with them produced anything rather than satisfaction. Maria, as being the best-looking, was his favourite. But the domestic affections flourish not in the parching latitudes of the political hemisphere. With his father, there was but little of the genuine feelings either of reciprocal esteem or affection; and thus whilst Fitzosborne was admired, and even courted in

every other house, at Lord Tralee's he was seldom happy.

The day fixed for his departure, arrived therefore with little regret on either side. Lady Tralee having gone through the form of bidding him farewell, declared it to be her intention to pay some visits in the neighbourhood, and ordered the carriage for herself and daughter. But when it arrived at the door, a new freak came into the minds of the young ladies; they decided on walking, instead of driving; and therefore left her Ladyship to the enjoyment of solitude.

Elm Park differed as little from its numberless patterns in the disposition of its grounds, as in the arrangement of its apartments. Small as the demesne was, it was nearly all devoted to pleasure-grounds, through which serpentine walks and intersecting shrubberies meandered apparently without end. It was altogether no bad prototype of its owner, where natural insignificance was concealed by all the trickery of delusion.

Into one of these shaded walks, the three

Misses Fitzosborne had turned, with much gratulation at having, by such bold defiance, escaped the tedium of a drive with mamma. Sometimes laughing, oftener quarrelling, and but seldom silent, they pursued their walk: but in one of those occasional pauses, their attention was attracted by the noise of footsteps in one of the twin alleys, and the murmur of voices in apparent whispering. The moment they ascertained that the speakers, whoever they might be, were talking in the confidence of being unheard, their curiosity of course was excited to ascertain the subject of their discourse; and cautiously approaching as near as possible to the intervening shrubberies, they all three listened in mute attention. At first, however, their endeavours were fruitless, as the rustling of the breeze prevented their hearing distinctly. An aperture a little further on seemed more favourable; and stealing forwards, they pushed aside some of the branches, and, stooping down, were able to catch a few detached sentences.

"Impossible!" said one, whom they fancied was Lionel. "A premature acknowledgment would have destroyed every thing."

"But I cannot bear such continued hypocrisy; it is contrary both to my judgment and principles, and I must say——"

The eager sisters lost the conclusion of this speech, for they heard the footsteps suddenly turning down the cross-walk that communicated with the one in which they had so conveniently stationed themselves; and fearing to be found in their present awkward position, all three jumped into the middle walk at almost the same instant that Lionel and Mrs. Smith appeared at the other end.

The countenances of the whole party betrayed alike confusion. "I thought you had gone with Lady Tralee," exclaimed Mrs. Smith, almost breathless, at the same instant, and much in the same tone, that the three sisters in different phraseology expressed their uniform belief that she was busy in her own room. Betsy was the only one sufficiently

mistress of herself to look with anything like scrutiny at Fitzosborne. If the natural emotion of surprise which his companion had expressed in any degree moved his countenance at the first moment, its traces were no longer visible; and he quietly but steadily returned the looks of his sisters, who, conscious of their own impropriety, appeared much more embarrassed than he did.

"I am glad to find," said Fitzosborne, after a short pause, "that you did think Mrs. Smith was busy in her own room; it is some excuse, ladies, for your having so totally excluded her from your morning arrangements."

"Mrs. Smith is generally mamma's companion," retorted Jenny, with a malicious emphasis on the last word.

"And I'll answer for it she would rather be yours, Lionel," rejoined Betsy, laughing at poor Mrs. Smith's evident confusion.

"The time may come——" replied the other, drawing herself up with a dignity the young ladies had never seen her assume before.

"You flatter me, Mrs. Smith," interrupted Lionel, fixing his speaking eyes steadily upon hers; then turning to Betsy, he added in a gayer manner—"I shall be quite happy if Mrs. Smith has liked her companion as much as I did mine. We have had a delightful walk, have we not, Mrs. Smith? I almost forget though what we were talking of—let me see. Oh! I recollect—it was on poetry—and the drama."

"'The Conscious Lovers,' or 'The School for Scandal,' I suppose," rejoined Jenny, with some asperity.

"Ha! ha! ha! very good," answered Lionel, with perfect *nonchalance*. "You will come, I suppose, Jane, to the 'Clandestine Marriage' at last; but I am afraid Mrs. Smith and I have not yet got beyond Shakspeare. We were disputing on the beauties and defects of Othello; that was our last subject, was it not?" and Lionel addressed this observation to Mrs. Smith in a tone of soothing kindness: but a faltering "Yes!" was her only reply.

"I recollect you were abusing Iago for his duplicity; and I was defending it for the sake of the *dénouement*?"

"But you remember, Mr. Fitzosborne, that duplicity caused the death of Desdemona at last."

There was something in the tone of Mrs. Smith's voice, as she made this single observation, that went directly to the heart; its very mildness was affecting; and the tears that seemed to tremble in her eyes, gave assurance that the deep pathos with which she spoke, arose less from her judgment than from her heart. But the subject was pursued no farther; for they had now arrived in sight of the hall-door, where Fitzosborne's carriage had been some time waiting; and having taken a kind farewell of his sisters, and rather a formal one of Mrs. Smith, he commenced his journey to London.

And what, meantime, had befallen Julia Fielding? When her father returned from Alton Forest, the delighted parent beheld, al-

most with surprise, the increased beauty of his child. The dazzling radiance of her eyes, the almost heavenly brightness of her complexion, forcibly recalled to his memory the loveliness of her departed mother. He gazed with unutterable feelings on his only earthly treasure; and, perhaps, in recalling to his mind some of the vague hints and insinuations which had dropped occasionally from Lord Alton, Mr. Fielding might have thought with pride of the probability of his adored Julia being, at no distant period, elevated to a rank she was in every respect so qualified to adorn.

In the confidential intercourse which had taken place at Alton Forest between the Earl and Mr. Fielding, Julia had not unfrequently been the subject of their conversations; but in these, Lord Alton had not failed to penetrate even further into the embryo secrets of her history, than Mr. Fielding was aware.

Of his niece's beauty and accomplishments, the Earl had formed almost an exaggerated estimate; partly founded on the various reports

which had reached him, and partly from his still partial recollection of her mother, for he had not seen Julia since she was a child. Nor had the trumpet of fame omitted to bring to his Lordship's ear many surmises respecting a projected alliance with Lord Calvert, which Miss Fielding's intimacy at Ellesmere seemed to corroborate.

Many were the anecdotes which the open-hearted rector almost unconsciously repeated, that impressed a conviction on Lord Alton's mind, that a union so gratifying to both families would not be repugnant either to the lovely Julia, or to her intended spouse: and in listening to these details, the Earl involuntarily cherished the visions of happiness which once more floated on his mind, in the images of Julia and Lord Calvert. Neither his own marriage nor that of his daughter had been happy; and with melancholy pleasure he now clung to the idea, that domestic bliss had not for ever fled the mansion of his ancestors, and that he might still live to see, in Julia's des-

tiny, that union of rank, virtue, happiness, and talents, which the characters of his own wife and daughter had hitherto prohibited.

But Mr. Fielding had not been many days returned to the rectory, when he trembled to think that the lovely rose he had cultivated with such tenderness, and nourished with such care, might yet bear in its bosom the canker of decay. True, Julia's beauty was never more radiant than he then beheld it: but why should that hectic tinge succeed a paleness scarcely less becoming?—why should he now for the first time perceive a flutter and uncertainty in her spirits, which was contrary to the usual placidity of her disposition?—why did she turn, almost shuddering, away from the beautiful flower her pencil had but half completed? —or why did she ask, almost with tears in her eyes, to be excused singing those airs in which she once so much delighted?

The cold winds of autumn had begun to strip the trees of their summer foliage, whilst with treacherous smiles it seemed to add new glory

to their fading garlands.—The dark crimson of the beech, the lighter gilding of the chesnut, and the flaunting yellow of the quivering poplar, gaily danced in the sun-beam that brightened their decay; whilst the evergreen oak, or stately pine, alone seemed to withstand the delusive charm that wooed them to change, and, in changing, die. But the silver stems of the beech, and the ivied trunk of the giant elm, became day by day more visible. And day by day the broad and glassy stream bore proudly on its bosom new trophies of the fading beauties of Thirtown woods, as it rolled silently onwards towards the deeper glades of Ellesmere.

Still, however, the scarlet berries of the holly, the shining leaves of the humbler bay, and the wintry blossom of the laurestinus, lent new beauties to the scene; and the flower-garden of the rectory seemed the last favoured spot which could detain the fleeting breath of summer; it was like the Oasis in the desert, the green and fragrant spot, where all around was wild—despoiled—and shelterless.

By degrees the neighbourhood was deserted. Lady Harriet Moreton had quitted the barracks at Broomhill, to make a tour of visits; and Sir Henry Moreton had also gone, on leave of absence, to shoot in Scotland. The Misses Weldon had prevailed on Sir James and their "mamma," to take them on their annual pilgrimage to Brighton. And the Ladies Calvert had accompanied the Earl and Countess of Ellesmere, to one of the family estates in a distant county, where they expected Lord Calvert to meet them. Thus, Julia and Mr. Fielding were left almost alone; and had Julia enjoyed her usual cheerfulness, the circumstance would have been a source of happiness to both.

The living of Thirtown was not the only one enjoyed by Mr. Fielding, and he occasionally considered himself obliged to visit his other benefices. He had gone on one of these excursions, leaving Julia, as usual, under the peculiar charge of Old Nurse, who not only professed, but actually entertained for her an attachment almost maternal.

It was one of those fine days towards the latter end of October, which sometimes is given to cheat winter of its frown, like a playful child encroaching on the sterner dignity of its sire. The sun beamed so brightly on the terrace, that Julia was tempted to extend her usual walk, and the gate being open to the park, she strolled further on, sometimes lost in her own reflections, and sometimes stopping to admire the rich tints of the woods and their changeful beauties, that seemed to vary at every step.

She had insensibly diverged into the same path which she and nurse had followed the evening she had first met Lord Calvert on his return from Italy. The seat, where she had then beheld him, was again her resting-place: but how changed were now her feelings towards him!—shame, mortification, and resentment, oppressed her heart; the burning tears coursed each other down her cheeks; and, alternately condemning him and herself, the moments passed by unheeded.

At length, her painful reverie was disturbed by the sound of footsteps, and, looking up, she saw, through the almost leafless trees, the figure of a man descending the very path Lord Calvert had trod. Pale and motionless, she watched every winding of the road, whilst her heart beat almost audibly. The person resembled him at a distance; the height and proportions seemed the same; was it—could it be Lord Calvert? She tried to rise, but had not strength to do so; and, the same instant, Fitzosborne stood before her.

Aware of the various difficulties he had to encounter, and but the more determined to surmount them, Lionel had become impatient of the suspense which he then endured. He knew by Lord Calvert's letters to him, that there was no chance of his meeting any of the Ellesmere family in the country, or even Lady Harriet Moreton, whose assistance he did not then require; and he therefore determined to visit Mr. Fielding, on the faint hope that he might receive an invitation from him, to stay

as Lord Calvert's friend, and then to trust to chance for the furtherance of his schemes. But the unexpected circumstance of Mr. Fielding's absence—the still more unlooked-for accident of thus meeting Julia alone—the opportunity of speaking to her, which might not again occur—and even more than all this, her transcendent beauty, her silence, and her agitation, hurried him into a declaration of his attachment, more explicit and more fervent than he had originally intended.

Professions of love are always uninteresting, generally tiresome, and not unfrequently ridiculous, to all but the parties concerned. What therefore Fitzosborne said on this occasion, must be left to the imagination. His insinuating voice—his speaking glance—his impassioned words; all that talent or sophistry could devise, were exerted to win a favourable answer from Julia, with a sincerity by no means congenial to his genuine character. But all his blandishments were vain: with a dignified composure, she thanked him for his

preference, but gave him no ground for hope. And finding that his presence by no means conquered her resolution, he left her, with an agitation which he did not attempt to conceal, and returned to the gate, where he had left his carriage.

A few hours had scarcely passed, when a messenger on horseback brought a *paquet* for Miss Fielding, and rode off without waiting for an answer, or leaving any address.

The *paquet* proved to be from Lionel. In an eloquent but evidently hurried style, he expressed his disappointment and regret. He, however, asserted the impossibility of any change occurring in his sentiments towards Julia, and trusted only to time and future assiduity. He then, as he said, with the greatest reluctance, and even delicacy, entered on the subject of Lord Calvert. He mentioned having heard, previous to his arrival at Ellesmere, reports of their projected union, which circumstance had in some degree occasioned his not having accompanied his friend in his

frequent visits to the rectory; adding, that those visits had led him to think it was Lord Calvert's intention to propose for Julia, notwithstanding some apparently contradictory sentiments that he had heard Lord Calvert frequently express when they were abroad together. That Lionel had no sooner beheld Miss Fielding, than, judging from his own sentiments, he had believed it impossible to behold her unmoved: that he had therefore absented himself from her society, till his doing so had called forth his Lordship's observations; and that it was not till Lord Calvert had so evidently avoided Miss Fielding's society, during her visit to Ellesmere, that Fitzosborne had ever given credence to Lord Calvert's frequent assurance of being totally indifferent to Miss Fielding, and inviolably attached to another lady: and that even before he could make up his mind to this present declaration, he had written to Lord Calvert, whose answer he enclosed. And he concluded, by saying, that although his present addresses to Miss

Fielding were thus made with his Lordship's knowledge and concurrence, he was aware that the world in general, and Lord and Lady Ellesmere in particular, would scarcely credit this fact: but that secure in the rectitude of his own conduct, and he trusted not unworthy at least of Miss Fielding's esteem, he would trust to time for a change in her disposition towards him; and only ask, that if it was her pleasure to mention what had passed between them, she would at least do him the justice to vindicate him towards the man whom he professed, "he was still proud to call his friend."

Poor Julia! What were her feelings as she perused the declaration which Lord Calvert had so imprudently given to Lionel at Ellesmere? She had with her no parent to guide, no friend to soothe her: irritated almost beyond the power of restraint; indignant at what she termed a double injury, and impatient to remove the hated manuscripts from her view, she hastily replaced both letters in a blank cover, and

addressing them to Lionel at Lord Tralee's, once more restored the dangerous weapon into his possession. But in thus relieving her eyes from a sight so painful to them, the weight but pressed the heavier on her heart: had she kept the paper, some other explanation of it might have suggested itself than that given by Fitzosborne; but now nothing remained but her acute and indelible recollection, that while Lord Calvert had trifled with her feelings, and, by every look and action, endeavoured to convince her that she was the object of his choice, he had at the same time with even more assiduity persuaded others that he was perfectly indifferent to her, and inviolably attached to another woman.

Painful, nay mortifying as was this conviction, she could not, with all her endeavours, summon sufficient courage to impart it to Mr. Fielding; and at last, solicitous to discover an excuse for having thus once in her life excluded him from her confidence, she with natural sophistry persuaded herself that it was

even her duty to keep that secret from him, as such an insult on the part of Lord Calvert would infallibly entail a quarrel with her father and the family of Ellesmere. Thus she voluntarily deprived herself of that advice and protection which might have saved her many a day of sorrow: but meantime, a visible change took place in her deportment, almost in her character. The hereditary pride which till then had lowered and nestled in her bosom, amidst all the softer feelings of genuine modesty and feminine weakness, now burst to light, and sat triumphant on her polished brow. Her figure was more erect; her air more noble; her tread more decided: the lustre of her eye was not diminished; and if the colour of her cheek waned yet still more, her spirits seemed to regain all that steadiness which before was lost. It is true, her painting was not resumed; but her piano-forte was re-opened, and all her songs (with the exception of but one) were sung till not a tremor in her voice remained. Before the arrival of Fitzosborne, her drooping figure might have

seemed the beautiful prototype of Venus weeping at the feet of Jove: now the halo of dignity pervaded all her form—"she looked a goddess, and she moved a queen;" but still preserving a consistency of grace, her beauty only changed its character, and appeared the bright original of *Venere trionfante.*

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGER.

No eye undazzled o'er her beauty strays,
Though on her beauty none but virgins gaze ;
Rezia herself unconscious seems alone
Of charms that all, save her, resistless own.

OBERON.

THE day after the family at Ellesmere returned home, Lady Matilda Calvert repaired to the rectory with all the anxiety of true and disinterested friendship. She was unfeignedly solicitous to draw, if possible, from Julia some explanation of the change in her sentiments towards Lord Calvert, which had not escaped her penetration.

Her brother had fulfilled his promise of

meeting them on their last tour; but all her kind endeavours were lost upon him. She saw he was evidently unhappy, and as evidently anxious to conceal the cause of that unhappiness; and from one or two observations, or rather queries, which casually escaped him, Lady Matilda conjectured that Fitzosborne was in some way connected with these painful feelings. Her hatred of Lionel was of course confirmed: but on the subject of Julia Fielding all her inquiries were baffled; for on one occasion, when she and Lord Calvert were alone, and she had purposely brought round the conversation to the mention of her name, he exclaimed in a petulant tone, "For God's sake, Matilda, don't bore me about that girl; I really do believe you and all the rest of the family are in a conspiracy to force me to marry her." This, and one or two similar observations on his part, led her to the determination never again to speak to him of Miss Fielding.

But if Lord Calvert was thus incomprehensible on the subject of Julia, his claims on the

affections of his relatives in every other respect were never so confirmed. It seemed as if he felt conscious of having voluntarily curtailed too much his visit to Ellesmere Park; and now that no Fitzosborne was at hand to divert the current of his better and kindlier feelings, all his talents, all his acquirements, were brought forward for the advantage and pleasure of their domestic scene. He amused his mother with accounts of some of his travelling adventures: he joined his father in all his beneficent plans for the comfort of his tenantry: his sisters' accomplishments were improved by the refinement of his taste and the superiority of his knowledge, whilst to his cheerfulness, nay even his vivacity, the little circle owed their chiefest animation; but his loudest laugh sometimes ended in a sigh, and whilst all seemed happier and better from his society, the anxious gaze of Lady Matilda found, or fancied, a daily alteration in his looks, though he strenuously contradicted all assertions of his not being in perfect health and unfeigned spirits.

It was therefore with twofold anxiety that Lady Matilda repaired to the rectory; but when she arrived, the alteration in Julia's appearance and manner deeply affected her: she was struck by her having not only become much thinner, but she received her with a mixture of affection and restraint she had never before observed. Julia was however obstinately silent whenever Lord Calvert's name was mentioned; and still more obstinate in refusing Lady Ellesmere's most pressing invitation to spend the time of her father's next absence at the Park.

The winter now approached with rapid strides. At night, the rain was heard to fall in torrents; and even in daytime, the river sounded loud and mournful, as if bewailing the hours of sun-shine and happiness that had gone past on the stream of time. Mr. Fielding was again to leave the rectory; and as he and Julia were paying a morning visit to Ellesmere, even he joined in the entreaties of the Countess, that his daughter should for a day or two become an inmate of their family; but she resisted with

a determination that surprised even where it did not offend.

"Well, positively, Julia, you shall not remain alone at the rectory; if you will not come to us, I must be your visitor: may it not be so, mamma?" And as Lady Matilda said this, she turned with an asking look to Lady Ellesmere.

"I should be sorry to banish any of this family from their happy home. You had better not come to me, Matilda; I am but a dull companion."

The first part of this sentence Julia spoke with such a haughty air, that poor Lady Matilda looked almost mortified; and both Mr. Fielding and the Countess seemed equally astonished: but at the concluding words, her voice faltered, and a tremulous motion agitated the corners of that mouth, which used to be the throne of joy. But no tear trembled in her eye; and nothing but the changeful colour of her cheek seemed beyond her power of control.

"Dearest! dearest Julia!" exclaimed Lady Matilda, throwing her arms round her ivory neck, and bursting into tears. How was it that she, once all softness and fragility, had now acquired such sudden inflexibility? and how was it that Matilda, whose fortitude had never failed before, now wept unrestrainedly on the bosom of her friend?

Lady Ellesmere looked with wonder on the scene; but Mr. Fielding, with a sad presentiment, walked to the window to conceal his emotion. His doing so, recalled Julia to other feelings. Kissing her beloved Matilda with an affection not less fervent than her own, she turned blushing to the Countess, and with a grace that had been always peculiarly her own, solicited her sanction to her friend's proposal, "if indeed she did not fear the rectory would be too dull for Lady Matilda." A playful smile, such as they had seen of yore, again lightened round her lovely mouth, and seemed at once a contradiction to the doubt of cheerfulness her words implied; and the arrange-

ment being thus concluded, Lady Matilda arrived at the rectory the same day that Mr. Fielding left it.

Lady Matilda's kindness was not entirely lost on Julia, who exerted herself with success to amuse and enliven this real friend. The following day was one of the most sombre that could be expected, even at that dreary season. The rain fell in torrents, and pattered on the broad flag-stone of the library-window: the leafless jasmine rattled against its numberless panes; and every gust of wind drew after it, as in a whirlwind, the last straggling honours of the year. Lady Matilda was sitting alone in the room, when she heard the sound of a carriage, and an impatient ring at the door-bell at an hour too early for common visitors. In a few minutes the footman entered the room, to say that a strange gentleman had called to see Mr. Fielding on business; and hearing that he was not at home, he wished to have permission to come in and write a letter.

Julia was sent to; who, on consultation with

nurse, desired that the gentleman should be shown into the library; and as the old butler was out, the footman was again master of the ceremonies.

The stranger descended from a plain travelling-carriage, which, though particularly handsome, bore no arms, or other insignia. A servant out of livery, who had travelled on the seat behind, received his master's orders, uttered in a low voice, as he assisted him to alight; and, leaving him at Mr. Fielding's door, desired the drivers to proceed to Fairton to change horses: no unnecessary operation, as the four smoking posters, who were then harnessed, were apparently not less tired than they were splashed. The equipage, however, turned off before the servant had an opportunity of inquiring who the stranger was; and as he merely bowed in answer to the footman's query direct, as to "what name shall I give in, sir?" he was ushered into the room where Lady Matilda was, without being announced.

On entering, he took off his glove, as if pre-

pared to shake hands; but started on seeing Lady Matilda, whom, nevertheless, he addressed as Miss Fielding. She soon, however, corrected his mistake, by informing him that Julia would be down stairs in a few minutes, and then courteously requested him to be seated.

This invitation, however, he did not think proper to accept: and walking decidedly, but not unceremoniously to the chimney-piece, he stood with his back to the fire, surveying in silence, evidently with intense interest, the varied contents of the room.

Meanwhile Lady Matilda, looking up occasionally from her work-frame, watched not less earnestly the stranger. He appeared to be about fifty, with an intelligent, rather than a handsome countenance. His eyes were brown, and particularly keen; and his eyebrows were darker than his general complexion warranted. His hair was dressed in a peculiar fashion, more approaching to what was common twenty years ago, than to more modern usage. Of the rest of his figure Lady Matilda could scarcely judge,

for a drab great-coat was buttoned up to his chin: he seemed however, though not remarkably tall, to be dignified almost to formality in his deportment, although his countenance relaxed even to animation when he spoke, and his eyes at all times beamed with vivacity.

The continued silence became somewhat embarrassing: it was only occasionally broken by such common-places as are usually resorted to on these occasions.

"What a dreadful bad day," observed Lady Matilda, looking towards the window.

"Yes; I scarcely ever remember the roads so dirty," answered the stranger. Lady Matilda had not seen his equipage. "Who *can* he be?" thought she; "he seems used to travelling. Surely, he cannot be the Leeds manufacturer Mr. Fielding expected last week."

It is to be remarked, that Lady Matilda had never been in company with a Leeds manufacturer. Again the conversation languished.

"Has Mr. Fielding been absent many days?" inquired the stranger, after another pause.

"He only left us yesterday. I believe he is gone to his living near Leeds." She thought again of plated tea-urns, and ornamental fire-irons: but she was not then observing the stranger.

"How provoking that I should have missed him! I passed through Leeds yesterday."

Lady Matilda looked up. She was surprised at this confirmation of her suspicions, and wondered at the elegance of a Leeds manufacturer.

Just then Julia made her appearance. The stranger started: he advanced with alacrity, and, shaking her hands with a cordiality she was unprepared for, and which recalled the roses to her cheeks, he suddenly exclaimed, "Good God! how like your mother!" and in an instant after, letting both her hands and his own fall, he joined his together, though at arm's-length, and stood lost in contemplation of Julia's countenance.

There was an expression compounded of kindness and melancholy in his look, which, in some degree, compensated for its earnestness:

but, nevertheless, Julia felt it irksome; and, in order to relieve herself, presented Lady Matilda by name to the stranger.

He seemed surprised, but by no means embarrassed. "Is Lord Ellesmere in this country, at present?" inquired he, as he placed himself in one of the green-leather chairs opposite to Julia.

Lady Matilda having answered in the affirmative, the stranger continued—"Lord Calvert is, I know, now shooting in the North; but I suppose you expect him back before Christmas?"

The stranger looked at Julia as he said this; and a quick unwelcome blush rose in her cheeks, but it was only momentary—gone,

Ere one can say it lightens.

"I am afraid not," answered Lady Matilda, hesitatingly; and she cast a timid, sidelong look at Julia.

"Your brother's engagements lie elsewhere," observed Miss Fielding. But who can

describe the peculiar tone, the haughty glance with which these words were uttered?

"Excuse me, Julia: I think I know Calvert better than you do. What his engagements are, I pretend not to guess: I can only answer for his inclinations; and those, I think —I believe, would lead him here."

Had Lady Matilda been alone with Julia, she would not have ventured this remark; she would have said more, or less. But the presence of the stranger gave her courage; and relying on his total ignorance of her allusions, she ventured on that equivocal expression of her opinions.

Miss Fielding answered only by a look, where incredulity was compounded with indignation; and by a smile, in which melancholy struggled with contempt. She felt as if the stranger's eye was still fixed upon her; and she was right: for he had not lost one word—one glance that passed. He perceived the conversation was painful; and with finished elegance, he imperceptibly led it to more general topics.

Music, literature, country pursuits, all were in turn discussed. The stranger expressed his opinions on every subject with the *retenue* which marked his deference to his fair auditors; but they were, at the same time, evidently conceived in so strong a mould, as to claim assent from all.

After his departure, both Lady Matilda and Julia wondered with each other how they could have talked so freely before a stranger; but whilst he was present, they were only surprised at the rapidity with which the moments flew. At last, his carriage was announced; and almost before Julia could express her polite request that he would stay for some refreshment, he said, with much apparent kindness and sincerity, "I am really sorry I cannot stay longer; but I have many miles to go to-day. May I hope, ladies, though you have both expressed such a decided preference for a country life, that I may have the honour of renewing my acquaintance with you in London. Is there any chance of Lady Ellesmere coming to town this spring?"

"I believe she has some intention of accompanying papa this season; though she has not been in London for many years."

"And will not you prevail on Mr. Fielding to do the same," politely inquired the stranger, turning to Julia.

"Oh! no; I should be very sorry indeed to leave this dear rectory," replied Julia, with some remains of her former vivacity. "But I think, Sir, you said you had business with my father: who may I say did him the honour of calling on him?"

"I declare you have caused me to forget my letter," returned the stranger with some gaiety, but infinite gallantry. "With your permission, I will tell him my business in a few words." So saying, he placed himself uninvited at the writing-table; and having hastily concluded his letter, he sealed it with one of the seals that lay beside him, and courteously taking leave of both ladies, he hurried to his carriage, and drove off at full speed.

Various were the conjectures formed by the two friends, as to who this anonymous stranger

could be; and the little incident formed the chief subject of their conversation till Mr. Fielding's return, when not a moment was lost in giving him the letter, and eagerly inquiring the name of the writer.

"I don't know the hand," said Mr. Fielding, deliberately;" but I verily think it is a disguised one in the direction. "Lord Alton's, I declare. And you have both made conquests.—He says, he leaves it to me to apologise for his not introducing himself: I can guess the reason though—he did not want Sir Henry Moreton to know of his being here; and I dare say he was not sorry to have an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with you, fair ladies. Ay, he says, a little farther on, 'the incognito was too amusing, and the conversation too interesting, to be interrupted by such a needless ceremony.' He says, however, Julia, that I must positively bring you to return his visit in London; and that he will write to you himself, to endeavour to prevail on you to leave the '*dear rectory*,' for the sake of being near your charming friend.—What does all this mean?—Eh! Lady Matilda?"

Again and again was Lord Alton's visit talked over from beginning to end; and Mr. Fielding scarcely regretted his own absence, when he considered that it even contributed to diminish the painful feelings with which otherwise Lord Alton's first visit to the rectory might possibly have been accompanied. He was also aware, that the same circumstance contributed much to accelerate his Lordship's acquaintance with Julia: nor did the Earl's subsequent correspondence controvert this opinion, as all his letters contained allusions to his lovely niece, and her very charming friend; and not unfrequently referring to his hopes, that Julia and Mr. Fielding would spend some time with him in town; and that then he should have an opportunity of cultivating the acquaintance of Lord Ellesmere and his family.

CHAPTER VI.

AT HOME IN THE COUNTRY.

To hear the lark begin his flight,
And, singing, startle the dull night;
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled morn doth rise:
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good-morrow.

L'ALLEGRO.

THE festivities of Christmas had drawn together, as usual, various groups at different houses; and amongst others, Lord Hauteville had assembled his customary guests. The twenty-fifth of December was passed, with all its pleasures and all its penalties. Every person

in the house had enjoyed the happiness of having their rest disturbed the night before by the simple choristers passing under the windows, and chanting their carols in the clear frosty air. These not inharmonious sounds had scarcely died on the ear, as the last band passed down the avenue, when the portly postman recited, at the utmost pitch of his stentorian lungs, his doggerel rhymes—

> Rise, my Lady, rise, and hear;
> Your faithful Bellman 's waiting here;
> Full twenty years are past and o'er,
> Since first he waited at your door;
> And twenty more he hopes to see,
> Beholden to your charity.
> So Lords, and Ladies, Gentles, all,
> A merry Christmas to the Hall.

Each individual of the family had his appropriate couplet; which, of course, received its appropriate remuneration. Then came the annual visit to the dairy, in order to redeem the holly and misseltoe. Next, the grand procession to church; followed by the dinner of

roast beef and plumb pudding to the school-girls and their dame, and a countless distribution of prize prayer-books within doors, and blankets, flannel petticoats, and household quarterns without. Happy England! where the natural and genuine feelings of generosity and benevolence may be indulged without incurring any penalty. In Ireland, no such scene would be tolerated; the roast beef and plumb pudding would be metamorphosed, in the crucible of prejudice, into the forbidden fruit offered by the Tempter; the blankets would be considered a covering for iniquity; the flannel petticoats a conversion of old habits; and worse than all, the quartern loaves would become, in the eyes of half the nation, absolutely the party—political—polemical—pharisaical—hypocritical—sophistical—metaphysical—proselytising—fermenting leaven of wickedness and fraud!

But Lord and Lady Hauteville, fortunately for themselves, lived within twenty miles of London; and they had enjoyed the heartfelt gratitude—the honest respect—the blunt but

cordial greetings of their poorer neighbours, without any secondary feeling either towards them or to themselves: nay more, they had looked

From nature up to nature's God!

and believed that one of the most acceptable proofs of thankfulness they could give to the Divine Author of all good, was to extend as far as possible the circle of that happiness which in themselves they so supremely felt.

These "better indications of humanity" were, however, with them strictly confined to their proper sphere. Lady Hauteville had never been known to discuss at her tea-table the nicer points of faith and of Brussels lace within the same half-hour. Nor was it the custom of the Viscount to circulate his own peculiar tenets with his decanters. They lived in its literal sense—in the world—leaving to others the charge of their own morality: indeed so different were their ideas of charity and

benevolence to those entertained by many wiser people, that they were content in most instances to take character upon trust; and if the people with whom it was their lot to associate kept within the bounds of decorum, they did not take upon themselves the painful duty of gauging their virtues; nor find an excuse for inhospitality in the more equivocal merit of superior punctiliousness. The result was, that their acquaintances were numerous, their friends valuable.

Having thus passed Christmas with their family tenantry, and a few of those who were worthy to be called their friends, their invitations were extended to a larger circle, and now the hour approached for their assembling. Carriages of various names and sizes had arrived. Countless ladies' maids and valets had peeped into wrong rooms, and possessed themselves of ill-matched candlesticks. The groom of the chambers slowly paraded up and down the corridor on the principal floor, to be ready to escort those who were strangers into the distant drawing-room. On the second story, the upper

housemaid in her best bib and tucker lounged over the bannisters attentive to every call for "hot water for my master, ma'am,"—"there is no boot-jack in the pink-room, ma'am,"—"do have the kindness, ma'am, to send into the stable-yard to inquire if I left a small red-leather case in the side-pocket of master's *calèche*." And in the great hall, other detachments of *le corps ambulant* waited somewhat impatiently for the conclusion of these ceremonies; the liveried satellites discussing the round games of the night before, and the blue-coat gentry reading the newspapers with at least as much interest as their masters had done before.

As yet the drawing-rooms boasted of few inmates—a large blazing fire, happily compounded of logs of wood and Cannel coal, gave to one end of the room infinitely more light than was afforded to the other by the detached candles that stood on the marble tables. Still, however, the old-fashioned silk hangings looked somewhat dark, though well relieved by modern gilding. On the couch nearest to the fire, was

already stationed Lady Hauteville. One of her grandsons was on her knee admiring a book of pictures nearly as much as the delighted grandmother admired the flaxen curls that in his eagerness often brushed against her cheek. Her eldest grand-daughter, in short petticoats, white trowsers, and bead bracelets, had climbed on the footstool to participate in the amusement under the pretence of explaining the beautiful pictures to Little Johnny. Mr. Danvers, the Viscount's only son, stood, as most gentlemen do at their own fire-side at Christmas; and his eldest hope, a fine boy of near six years old, proud to excess of his new jacket and trowsers, stood, the exact copy of his father, with his back to the fire, and his little hands broadly displayed behind him.

Almost at the same moment, two opposite doors opened, and Lady Susan Danvers and Lord Calvert made their appearance; for the latter was one of the chosen few who had shared in the pleasures of the preceding days. Mr. Danvers was polite even to his wife, and re-

linquishing his own comfortable situation, he drew the *fauteuil* some inches nearer the hearth-rug, and seemed to place it for Lady Susan. She looked up to him with one of her usual affectionate smiles, though the offer of the seat was accepted as silently as it had been made; whilst Master Johnny no sooner perceived that his mamma was seated, than, sliding off Lady Hauteville's knee in the most unceremonious manner that can possibly be conceived, he deserted to "own mamma," and eagerly demanded her farther explanation of the aforesaid specimen of the fine arts, leaving the Visountess to arrange her velvet gown as she best could."

A further change of position occurred; for the young Lord (as the eldest boy was usually designated) no sooner observed Lord Calvert, than marching up to him, he put some further questions respecting the gondolas at Venice, which had been the subject of their last conversation: Lord Calvert good-humouredly took his old seat at the end of the table, and the boy, leaning on his knee,

Listen'd enraptured to the endless tale.

"Upon my word, Calvert, you are too good-natured," said Mr. Danvers. "I am sure when I last saw you in your sledge at Vienna, I could not have fancied you in such a domestic occupation as your present one."

"*A-propos* of sledges," replied Lord Calvert, rising to join the family group; "I have some notion of bringing them in next winter, if we have anything of a frost: what say you, Danvers, to a race in the Regent's Park?"

"Anything for a joke. Were you at Newmarket last meeting?"

"No; I intended to have gone down, but I was obliged to go into Norfolk."

"I saw by the papers you were at Melton, and, as usual, took the lead."

"You are too much accustomed to do that, my Lord," rejoined Lady Hauteville with a good-natured smile.

Just then the majority of the company dropped in one after the other. Amongst the

rest, Lady Charlotte Hargrove, sister to Lady Susan Danvers; the Duchess of Chester, accompanied by Miss Mortimer; a great many gentlemen, of whom Mr. Jessop was one; and finally, Sir Henry and Lady Harriet Moreton, who entered arm-in-arm, with due attention to connubial propriety.

There could not possibly be a greater contrast than between Lady Susan Danvers and her sister; the first was pale, with auburn hair dressed as plainly as the least approach to fashion would admit, of a tall slender figure, rather inclined to stoop, and much too thin to be considered handsome. Lady Charlotte, on the contrary, was what is usually called a fine dashing girl, with dark hair, dark eyes, very *soignée* in her dress, and particularly erect in her carriage. Some thought Lady Charlotte beautiful, but all agreed that Lady Susan was most interesting.

The party broke into little groups before dinner, in which probably every topic of conversation that could be suggested found a

place. The Duchess monopolised Lord Calvert, under the pretence of talking to him about Rome. Lady Charlotte Hargrove leaned behind her sister's chair, to catechise Lord Hauteville about her new horse. Miss Mortimer was listening very demurely to a long harangue, into which Mrs. Branton had entered respecting a charitable repository in the neighbourhood; and Lady Hauteville was exclusively devoted to Lady Harriet Moreton, when the welcome communication of dinner broke up these separate coteries.

Of course Lord Hauteville escorted her Grace. The Viscountess next issued her "commands," in that well-known short, peremptory manner, which always distinguishes her; and under those orders, Lady Harriet Moreton took Lord Calvert's arm; and the rest of the company were equally well assorted.

"How long have you been here, Lord Calvert? I declare I did not know you, that room is so dark."

"Then you did not positively mean to cut me.—How is Sir Henry?"

Before this interesting query could be answered they had reached the dining-room, where the blaze of *bougies* and silver was positively, not metaphorically, dazzling.

This resurrection brought many things to light that had been before concealed in darkness. New faces emerged, and bows and smiles proved the mutual recognition of the company during the whole time the soups were helping.

Sir Henry Moreton was the first who found himself perfectly at leisure to attend to this his most important business of the day. "Lord Hauteville, your mulligatawney is excellent; may I trouble you for some more?"

"You are quite right, Sir Henry," rejoined Mr. Danvers, following his example. "What an odious fashion that was which proscribed being helped twice to soup!"

"I fancy it went out when you brought over Sievrac, my Lord, for he is so famous for his soups," observed the Duchess.

"I hope your Grace patronises our new plan of drinking white wine instead of port

after cheese," whispered Lord Calvert, who sat between the Duchess and Lady Harriet Moreton, much to the satisfaction of both ladies.

"Yes; but I never eat cheese, except with maccaroni soup," replied her Grace; then turning to her host, she added, "I hope that soup is on Sievrac's list—it is *le roi des potages.*"

"Buller," called out Lady Hauteville, in her usual decided tone, "take care we have maccaroni soup to-morrow; you see, Duchess, I watch every word you say to my Lord."

The fact was, Lord Hauteville had not attended to her Grace. His fair daughter-in-law generally sat next to him, and he was entirely engrossed in making fruitless endeavours to persuade Lady Susan to admit his grandchildren down stairs after dinner,—"for this once only, as it was Christmas holidays."

"Lady Hauteville, let me recommend madeira instead of sherry; it is quite a mistake, I assure you, to leave such madeira as this;" so saying, the veteran Lord Shawe confirmed his precept by example. Not long returned from

India, he sat shivering with his back to the immense fire, with grey hair, yellow face, and a dark-blue coat buttoned up to the chin, in defiance of all the waistcoats *de velours épinglé*, which he had fully intended to exhibit.

"My dear General, I see you are cold; let me recommend this curry; I am sure you will like it." This was said in Miss Mortimer's best manner, and she piqued herself on always adapting her conversation to her auditors. Besides, she heard that the General had brought home with him immense wealth and a liver complaint.

"Mademoiselle finira par bien échauffer Monsieur le Général," observed a smart French coquettish lady, who was wife to Lord Shawe's *ci-devant* aid-de-camp. Her husband sat opposite to her, buttoned up, if possible, tighter than his *chef*, and looking equally bilious and disconsolate.

"I see Miss Mortimer is making *les yeux doux* to Lord Shawe, at the other end of the table," whispered Lady Harriet Moreton to

Lord Calvert; I strongly recommend her avoiding all old generals."

Lady Harriet said this with an indescribable archness in her countenance, but her voice had its usual insinuating softness, and her manner was so quiet, that those who could not see her laughing eyes, would not have deemed she said any thing *outré*.

Lord Calvert laughed—it was impossible to do otherwise; he turned to look at the lovely speaker, and it was still more impossible to withdraw his gaze. Lady Harriet had perhaps never looked handsomer than she did at that moment; her white satin gown showed her beautiful form to the utmost advantage, whilst the jewels that sparkled on her neck and arms were scarcely as resplendent as her complexion; for she had added all that complexion wanted in her rouge. Then her hair was particularly well drest, and every body knows how becoming a well-lighted dinner-table is to those beauties who are past the age of five-and-twenty.

Lord Calvert looked at her in admiration;

but it was not her resplendent jewels—nor her brilliant smile—nor her glossy hair—nor even the sparkling eyes, which rivetted his attention, —no; it was one speaking look—one transient glance, that as she turned those lovely eyes upon him, reminded him of Julia Fielding. *Her* eyes too had once met his as confidingly, as those that now shrunk not from his gaze.—But how beautifully would Julia's eye-lashes have fallen on her cheek, if he had thus presumed to look upon *her!* How roseate would that cheek have been, though unprofaned by any meretricious aid!

> Those eyes in liquid lustre moving,
> That cheek abash'd at man's approving.

All this *had* been. But where was she now? When would she again be to him as they two had been? And after all—what *was* she now to him?

All this, and more, passed through his mind as quickly as a falling star could drop on earth from heaven. For who can calculate the

speed of thought? His glance was scarcely yet withdrawn from the siren who sat proud in conscious beauty at his side: and when he asked her in the usual form to drink wine with him, she dreamed only of passing triumphs, and heard not the sigh "the goblet drowned."

Meantime, various other *tête-à-têtes* were carrying on round that magic circle. The contrast between this dinner and the one she had lately partaken of at Hauteville, forcibly struck the Duchess; and talking to her own thoughts, she called out in rather a loud voice to the Viscountess, "What have you done with your tiresome neighbours whom I met here some time ago?—I mean the Drawl-ees."

"*Tralees*, my dear Duchess," answered Lady Hauteville. "I wonder you forget any thing connected with your favourite Fitzosborne."

That name grated harshly on Lord Calvert's ear. It seemed to come in such close connexion with Julia Fielding! He wished to

fly from the painful train of thoughts that seemed to rise unbidden to his mind; and he turned again to Lady Harriet as a diversion to them. But she too found a talisman in Fitzosborne's name.

"In very truth," replied the Duchess, "I never can associate the idea of Fitzosborne and those automata he calls sisters. Besides, you know, the whole race of Drawlees have sprung up since I went abroad. My acquaintance with Fitz begun at the other side of the Alps. *Dieu merci!* I really am not acquainted with the ladies."

"Is it true that Fitzosborne is going to marry Miss Fielding?" inquired Mr. Jessop, in his usual tone of *nonchalance,* as he leaned back on his chair to desire the servant to bring him some *suprême aux truffes.*

"When did you hear that news, Jessop?" inquired Sir Henry Moreton: and as he put his head forward to make this query, it seemed as if he was looking at Lady Harriet; but she was just then engaged with an admirable

épigramme d'agneau, which she strongly recommended to her next neighbour, Mr. Lawson.

"I heard it at Broomhill Barracks—Brisbane met him coming out of Mr. Fielding's park—and it was reported he had come down on purpose to propose for her, and had been accepted."

"I should think that not at all improbable," observed Lord Hauteville; "for, the last time I saw Lord Tralee, he could think or speak of nothing but Miss Fielding's merits and high connexions."

"She is first cousin to Lady Harriet," said Sir Henry, pompously.

"Then do tell us something about her, Lady Harriet. Is she pretty?" inquired Lady Hauteville.

"I am really no judge. But I believe, Mr. Jessop, you think her beautiful:" again Lady Harriet's countenance assumed that indescribable charm betwixt *naïveté* and grace.

"'Pon my honour, I think she is one of the

loveliest persons I ever beheld: if she dressed better, she would be irresistible."

"What! then she is a *champêtre* beauty?" inquired her Grace. "Lady Harriet, do excuse me; but if my dear Fitz is to marry your cousin, I should like her to have been *distinguée* in her appearance. It would be dreadful to have another *seccatrice* appended to Lionel."

Lord Calvert turned to the Duchess, and thought for the moment, that she herself looked positively ugly: after a pause for an instant, he added—"Your Grace need be under no apprehension on account of Fitzosborne; for if he marries Miss Fielding, he will marry one of the most beautiful women in England."

"I hope when Lionel does marry my cousin, he will superintend her toilet himself, for certainly she wants a little of his good taste—Don't you think Fitzosborne's taste is perfect, Sir Henry?"

Lady Harriet had caught her husband's first glance; and the present effrontery of her own was intended as its punishment. Lady Susan

stared. Lady Charlotte almost laughed. Sir Henry clenched his teeth, but was saved the trouble of a reply, for the anxious moment arrived for a change of courses; and Mr. Buller's right arm and pendent napkin rather impeded the Baronet's utterance, as he carefully replaced a *poularde à la sauce tomate,* by a superb *crême à la vanille renversée.*

The conversation now took another turn. The different bills of fare were resorted to. Pheasants and woodcocks gradually disappeared: and pyramids and chantillies were dissected at the side-table, till all the "spirits

> Melted into air—into thin air.
> The solemn temples were dissolved,
> And left not a rack behind."

Less ideal were the pleasures afforded by Lord Hauteville's noted cellarage. The *vin du pape* led to an animated discussion, on the part of the Duchess, as to the vineyards round Avignon, and the water of Vaucluse. Mr. Jessop said little: but he bore with admirable

fortitude Lady Charlotte's unceasing raillery on his avowed admiration of Miss Fielding. Lord Hauteville got leave from Lady Susan at least to send some orange-jelly to the children. Madame Hervey divided her *petits soins* between Sir Henry Moreton, who was delighted with her, and Lord Shawe, who was beset by Miss Mortimer. Mr. Danvers and Mr. Hervey were deep in the Carnatic before the cloth was removed: and Mr. Lawson was occasionally kept awake by Lady Hauteville, and oftener lulled into a mental lethargy by the amiable Mrs. Branton. At last, ginger-ice, and coffee-ice, gave excuse for rosolio and noyau, and all the addenda of walnuts, chesnuts, dates, and filberts. The Indian sweetmeats were approved of even by Lord Shawe; the sour shaddocks were devoured by his aid-de-camp; the olives recommended by the Anglo-Italian Duchess. The *prunes Reine Claude* were *tout bonnement* patronised by Lady Harriet; and the young ladies contented themselves with humbler almonds and raisins. At

last, the "strife was o'er," and the ladies left the gentlemen to port and politics.

"What a bore it is, Madame Hervey, that we don't adopt the fashion of your social country, and bring the gentlemen out with us after dinner!" said the Duchess, throwing herself on the couch, preparatory to her *siesta.*

"Vous avez bien raison, ma chère dame; mais, après tout, expliquez-moi ce petit mot là: qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un *bore?* j'entends toutes les dames Anglaises qui se plaignent des *bores,* et je ne puis pas les comprendre:" and so saying, Madame Hervey placed herself on the *tabouret* at the Duchess's feet.

"C'est qu'à Paris il n'y en a pas, ma belle."

"C'est donc un des priviléges Anglais qui sont tant vantés par-tout—comme votre chambre des Députés, par exemple! Moi je suis bien fâchée que mon pauvre mari n'a pas l'honneur d'être un *bore.*"

"Il peut facilement le devenir, je crois; mais demandez tout cela, je vous prie, à Miladi Susan."

"Miladi Susan! Dieu m'en garde! veux-tu que je m'adresse à une dame si parfaitement blonde Anglaise? Elle a l'air glacial tout-à-fait — mais, tenez — cette Miladi Harriet, qui a une si belle chevelure — je parierois qu'elle peut très-bien me dire ce que c'est qu'un mari *bore*—je vais la questionner tout de suite."

"How could you be so wicked, my dear Duchess," observed Miss Mortimer, as she carefully laid her Grace's cachemires over her feet. The Duchess scarcely took the trouble of concealing her laughter.

Well, Lady Susan, are the babes asleep?" inquired Lady Hauteville, as soon as she saw her daughter re-enter the room: and drawing her own chair close to Lady Susan's, they began a *sotto-voce* conversation about the nursery, for the Viscountess always left to her guests the care of entertaining themselves between dinner and tea.

The peals of laughter which occasionally broke forth from Lady Harriet and Madame Hervey as they stood together on the fire-place,

soon attracted Lady Charlotte Hargrove, who, taking down one of the hand-screens of the chimney-piece, stood on the vacant corner of the hearth-rug ready to join in the conversation whenever an opportunity offered. Miss Mortimer, who was known to her, but not to either of the other ladies, came forward in reality for the same purpose, but ostensibly to admire Lady Charlotte's trimming *suspendue*. And Mrs. Branton, not finding any person particularly willing to attend to her, deposited her ponderous person in the first arm-chair she met with that would admit her; heedless that it stood exactly half-way between the two couches, and directly opposite the group of ladies, who effectually superseded the expansive newspaper which Mrs. Branton almost unnecessarily displayed as a fire-screen—whilst she listened with eyes, ears, and mouth open, unconscious that her petticoats were by no means *à la ronde* behind, having hitched in the mouldings of the chair on which she had placed herself.

Soon after, tea was announced, and the ladies

adjourned to the saloon; Lady Harriet and Lady Charlotte discussing, as they went in together, the difficult question, whether it was or was not an improvement in modern arrangements to have tea *en buffet*. One of its advantages the ladies were perfectly aware of; namely, that it afforded a *point de réunion* for both beaux and belles, which is always so much wanted before music begins; and calculating on this important circumstance, Lady Charlotte possessed herself of the chair which was the most accessible of the whole group.

Miss Mortimer, with equal foresight, stationed herself at the fire:—"Good generalship," whispered Lady Hauteville to the Duchess, as the two experienced matrons communicated together *sur les petites ruses*, which the actors fancied were unperceived: Lady Harriet Moreton rose a step higher in the scale of prescience, conscious of her own powers of attraction. She was perfectly indifferent as to her position, or rather chose one that it would require exertion to approach; whilst Madame

Hervey kept her chair at a considerable distance from that of Mrs. Branton, under the pretext "de ne pas chiffonner les volants de Madame."

Mr. Jessop was the first of the male party who deserted the dining-room. Taciturn himself, he was by no means averse to being talked to, or even at; and he was of course perfectly aware that the commission he had the honour to bear in his Majesty's sixtieth regiment of dragoons was equal to a patent for the exercise of those prerogatives. Lady Charlotte looked very handsome; the Duchess looked very conversable; both seemed ready to receive his silent attentions: meanwhile, the *femme-de-chambre* nearest to him abruptly inquired whether he chose black tea or green. This interrupted the course of his previous deliberation, and he finally found himself *debout* behind Madame Hervey, who, without further preface, saved him the trouble of talking for the next half-hour.

Not so Mr. Lawson; he was a dandy too, but of another caste. Not sufficiently sure of his

own station in society, he was one of the many who walk upon stilts to keep themselves out of the dirt: Lord Calvert had long been his model of exquisitism; and having narrowly watched him at dinner, he perceived that he was affable, and even vivacious; he therefore gradually relaxed his *air farouche*, and drawing his chair near that of Lady Charlotte, he prepared himself for active service by unpocketing an enormous silk handkerchief, which he continued to have recourse to, till he had collected a sufficiency of words and ideas to remark, "how very cold it was."

The rest of the gentlemen soon followed. Sir Henry, who by no means looked as well in coloured clothes as in his uniform, relaxed nothing of his military deportment. A small proportion only of his figure rested on a corner of the ottoman beside her Grace of Chester, a large superfluity of legs stretched out in front, and, resting his elbows on his knees, he carelessly played with his tea-spoon, as, leaning quite forward, he led the Duchess very adroitly into

an animated discussion on the beauties of the *Lago di Como.*

The Duchess had not much sentiment, but she was possessed of a lively imagination, and a peculiar fluency of expression. She had read a great deal more than she had felt, and perhaps seen more than either. The consequence was, that she possessed much of that mechanical eloquence (if the term is admissible) which frequently constitutes the sole merit of French novelists. Madame Hervey once observed, "qu'elle s'extasie à merveille;" but the excitement was genuine whilst it lasted. She could describe an Italian sun-set as Claude Lorraine would paint it, or she could tell a story so as to excite the sympathy of all her hearers and her own at the same time. But both these would be to her merely the exercises of imagination. The tears she shed for the tales of woe were not those of artifice. She really wept as much, and as deeply grieved at the sorrows she recited as she would have done at seeing a tragedy, or reading a pathetic poem; but she

would have been disgusted with the actual view of those miseries, and only delighted in them as interesting images of fancy.

Sir Henry Moreton was exactly the character to draw forth all the talents of the Duchess of Chester: he had no inconveniently fine feelings to be worked too high, and he had quite sufficient knowledge to be really pleased by her enthusiasm, with tact enough to seem even still more so. Her Grace delighted in having an audience, but was totally indifferent as to whether they agreed with her or differed from her, provided only that they listened. Accordingly, she continued stationary on her ottoman long after the majority of the ladies returned to the drawing-room. Sir Henry Moreton remained, and played to admiration the same interesting part which is performed on the stage by a confidant or friend, who throws in a few questions and manifold interjections, for the sole purpose of giving *la prima donna* an opportunity of telling her whole story. Major Hervey listened in downright astonishment. Mrs. Bran-

ton kept her post, as she afterwards said, "because she thought the poor Duchess would not like to be left the only woman with all those gentlemen." Mr. Danvers, veritably amused at the whole scene, threw himself at full length upon the couch at the other side of the fire; and Lord Hauteville sauntered up and down the room, listening sometimes to her Grace, and sometimes to the music which occasionally sounded from the other room.

At last, the music prevailed: Lady Susan had played admirably on the piano-forte, and Lady Charlotte accompanied her on the harp. They were complimented by every body: but Lord Shawe vociferously encored it, declaring it to be "the finest march he had ever heard in his life." It happened to be a *bolero;* but nobody corrected the veteran. Miss Mortimer next sung a grand cantata, preceded by a recitative: Lord Shawe also praised her performance; but he did not seem to comprehend it quite so much as the duo. However, what at last brought even the Duchess from the saloon,

was a little Venetian *barcarola,* that Lady Harriet Moreton sung, accompanied by an impromptu second of Lord Calvert's. There were not perhaps above six notes in the whole air; but the taste with which she sung them, and the foreign precision with which she articulated the words, gave an indescribable charm to her performance. Her voice was not naturally fine; but the whole was the very perfection of art, and every hearer felt its power; it seemed to recall to each, some thought they loved to indulge; and again and again was repeated the "encore" from every voice but that of Sir Henry Moreton.

"Do you know," said Mr. Jessop to Lord Calvert, as they stood together afterwards, "I never heard any body sing like Lady Harriet Moreton, except her cousin, Miss Fielding. It is astonishing how much they resemble each other: I could not help thinking of Miss Fielding the whole time."

Lord Calvert might have confessed that he had done the same; but it was not incumbent

on him to do so: he therefore only replied, after a moment's pause, "Julia—Miss Fielding I mean, has infinitely a better voice than Lady Harriet, and sings much truer; she has been even better taught, I think."

Mr. Jessop continued to hum through his teeth the *barcarola;* Lord Calvert crossed the room to where different little tables offered different temptations in the shape of Colchester oysters, minikin sandwiches, Lilliputian tartlets, and the hundred other nameless *et-cetera* that make up what is now called "no supper." At last, the ladies somewhat reluctantly armed themselves with the glittering chamber candlesticks, and the gentlemen consoled themselves for their departure in different ways, from iced water up to Regent's punch.

CHAPTER VII.

BAD WEATHER IN THE COUNTRY.

Farewell ethereal fields! the humble arts
Of life——the table—and the homely gods
Demand my song.

ARMSTRONG.

"WELL, this is a glorious Christmas breakfast!" exclaimed Sir Henry Moreton the next morning as he entered the room, his eye "in a fine frenzy rolling" over goose pies and venison pasties, and *pâtés aux foies gras*, and red rounds, and black game, and bread of all sizes, colours, and denominations, and broiled fish on a distant table for Lord

Shawe, who *had been* Scotch, and for the Duchess, who boasted she was still so. Then every possible distillation of tea and coffee, and marmalades, and dried fruits. Then a feast of reason and a flow of soul, in the shape of Literary Gazettes, Athenæums, New Monthlys, Quarterlys, Newspapers, and letters without end.

In the midst of the various investigations which these several objects called for, the groom of the chambers was seen, rather than heard, to pass behind the chair of each several guest, with a memorandum-book and pencil in his hand, whispering to each in their turn, "Sir Henry, do you hunt or shoot to-day?"—"Will my Lord use his own horses or master's?"—"Does my Lady choose to ride or drive?" with a courtly phraseology, and a due attention to avoid tautology.

At last, the whole important business was concluded; some of the gentlemen possessed themselves of the newspapers, and sat at ease, with their toes stretched towards the fire, their

elbow on some convenient table, and their whole soul in the well-filled page. Major Hervey and Mr. Lawson proceeded, as they said, to knock off a game at billiards. Lords Hauteville and Calvert stood at the window, the first debating whether he would not for once desert the petty sessions; the other calculating whether the ground was soft enough for hunting. Lady Hauteville had quietly seated herself at her huge embroidery frame; and the rest of the ladies were variously disposed, when the Viscountess abruptly inquired of her Lord, whether he had heard any thing from Lord Oporto? To which he answered in the negative, adding, "I suppose, therefore, he will join us to-day."

"Is it true that he lost so much money last month?" inquired Mr. Jessop.

"I am afraid it is indeed," replied Lord Hauteville.

"And what can the poor fellow do?" returned Mr. Jessop. "I believe his father has not three farthings in the world, and that all

the tradesmen advance every thing they use on the credit of the Marchioness.

"It's very true," answered Lord Hauteville; "and she has never been known once to forfeit that credit. She pays all the current debts regularly every month *in propriâ personâ;* and with all her apparent levity, manages the family affairs admirably."

"Then the Marquis has nothing to do but to make puns, I suppose," observed Lady Charlotte.

"I wish Lord Oporto passed his time as innocently," rejoined Lady Hauteville.

"Well, Miss Flinn's fortune will repair all that," said Lady Harriet Moreton. "I suppose he will now marry her directly."

"Poor thing!" rejoined the Duchess, with more sentiment than usual, "she will, probably, be another victim to that domestic tyranny, which forces a girl to marry merely for the mutual accommodation of the two families — every member of which, perhaps, is more solicitous for the union than the unfor-

tunate individuals themselves: and what will be the consequence? The husband will despise his wife, and the wife detest the husband. No sympathy, no affection will exist between them; their youth will pass like a blighted spring, and old age will entail but lengthened misery."

The Duchess, as she spoke, thought of some of the leading points in her own history, which she had thus in fact epitomised; and the sudden re-action gave that air of genuine feeling which, in general, her observations wanted. Lord Calvert looked at her with a kinder feeling of pity than she had ever before excited, whilst he listened with intense anxiety to the continued conversation.

"I pity any woman that marries," said Lady Harriet in a low voice, so as not to be heard by Sir Henry. "If she really loves her husband, she will be his dupe; and if she does not, she will be his slave."

"But, my dear Lady Harriet, between you and the Duchess, you will make out that all the

young ladies must die old maids. What do you say of matrimony, Lady Susan?" and as she said this, Lady Hauteville looked with an affectionate smile at her daughter-in-law. She, however, made no reply, unless a fond kiss bestowed on the rosy boy who was almost asleep on her lap could be construed as an answer.

"Upon my word, ladies," remarked Lady Charlotte, with a somewhat arch look at the black-eyed Mr. Jessop, "I think you fancy the husband has far too much power over the happiness of the wife. I am not so experienced as others, but I fondly flatter myself that the power of tormenting is pretty equal."

"A still stronger inducement for matrimony, Lady Charlotte," observed Lord Calvert laughing.

"But I think, Lord Calvert, Lady Charlotte is right. For instance, if Lord Oporto is forced to marry this Miss Flinn, *pour plaire à sa famille et à ses créanciers,* according to the French song; three to four Miss Flinn wins his heart in a twelvemonth, the odds are so

much in her favour at starting." As Lady Harriet said this, her beautiful eyes turned full on Lord Calvert, as if to read his very soul.

"Good! excellent!" exclaimed Lord Shawe, infinitely amused by the whole discussion, as he was a professed old bachelor. "I did not think any lady could have so admirably applied our technical terms. Lady Harriet, I say seven to four on your side."

"But what will a poor man do without a wife when he is old and infirm?" tenderly remarked Miss Mortimer, looking at the General with appropriate sympathy.

"Rather ask what a rich man would do," rejoined Sir Henry, who had spelt his paper, and now stood opposite Lady Harriet.

"Eh! mon Dieu," exclaimed Madame Hervey, "il y a des remèdes pour tout; mais pour moi, j'avoue franchement, je suis décidément en faveur de nos mariages de convenance: l'étoit sur ce pied là que j'épousois mon pauvre mari; et nous sommes des plus heureux: n'est-ce pas, mon Général?"

How this *petit mot* would have been *relevé* by the rest of the company is uncertain; for just then, a tremendous shower of hail turned the conversation. Its progress was watched with interest. First, the room was darkened, then the ground was whitened, and in proportion as the panes in the roof of the conservatory were heard to crack, the various plans of hunting, driving, and riding, were gradually destroyed.

Lord Calvert was the first to find a solace for the consequent disappointment. The rival Mantons were extolled; and he, Mr. Jessop, and Mr. Danvers, with Sir Henry Moreton, soon doffed their morning costume, and appeared "with pouch on side," in the variegated charms of velvet, fustian, or corderoy shooting-jackets. Lady Charlotte and Miss Mortimer volunteered to stamp the cards *à l'envi l'une de l'autre.* The game-keepers, with their guns and dogs and light-armed skirmishers ready to beat the woods, already crowded round the door, and almost before the watery sun broke through the passing storm, and glittered on the stiffening

grass, the gentlemen in their brown gaiters were seen striding across the park unimpeded by any trifling obstacle.

Diable boiteux—chess—*mots à double sens*—and such variety of recreations were resorted to by the ladies of the party, and the few gentlemen who remained with them. At last, Miss Mortimer succeeded in convincing Lord Shawe that the conservatory with its Moser stoves was decidedly the warmest place in the house, and she even had the magnanimity to invite Madame Hervey to accompany them thither. The Duchess seized upon Mr. Lawson, on his return from billiards, to teach him the game of German tactics; and he consoled himself for his stupidity at it, by reflecting that his conqueror was at least a Duchess: Mrs. Branton very good-naturedly helped Lady Susan to finish the open-work of a child's cap; and Lady Hauteville retired, if not

On hospitable cares intent,

at least to saunter through the different rooms

prepared for additional guests, and to give reiterated orders that Admiral Gunnel's room should not be—*too* warm.

The winter's day was not half over when Mr. Russel arrived. He was exceedingly disappointed at learning that he was too late for the first *battue;* but, hastily paying his compliments to the ladies, he followed the direction of the shots which were heard at no great distance from the house, and soon joined his brother sportsmen, much to the mortification of Lady Charlotte, who had eagerly watched his arrival. Lord Oporto, however, came in soon after Mr. Russel, and she consoled herself by besetting him with all her artillery of raillery, for that was the species of wit in which she most excelled, just as the last rays of twilight disappeared. The veteran Admiral was heard, rather than seen, entering the hall, where Lord and Lady Hauteville happened to be standing together, and where in a few minutes he was followed by his wife and three daughters, with little attention to the order of precedence usually allowed to the fair sex.

Again the pleasures of the toilet recommenced; and the first and second bells once more assembled the guests, amid darkness visible, in the damask drawing-room.

"What sort of creatures are the Admiral's daughters?" whispered Lady Harriet Moreton to Lord Oporto.

"Can't tell, 'pon honour; have not seen them yet. It is quite impossible to go as far as that marble table to see anything less than an ostrich," returned his Lordship, yawning.

"Why, Calvert!" said Lord Hauteville, "Mr. Russel tells me you beat him shooting this morning;" and then followed an animated discussion of all the "by-gone pleasures of the chase."

Miss Mortimer was in great triumph, for she had engaged Lord Shawe in a long explanation of all the truisms of Hajji Baba. "It is scarcely a fiction, I assure you," added he, "as most of those who have been in Persia can testify." Meanwhile, in another part of the room, Mr. Jessop allowed Lady Charlotte to talk at him unintermittingly; whilst the Duchess and Ad-

miral Gunnel were earnestly discussing tales of other times; and Lady Hauteville and Lady Susan Danvers devoted themselves exclusively to the rest of his family.

Thus happily was the party disposed of when dinner was announced. But no sooner did the full blaze of light fall on the three sisters, who had so lately joined the circle, than even Lord Oporto confessed it was worth while taking many steps to see such graces. Unequalled brightness of eye, and teeth, and cheek; dark glossy hair, which curled in their necks behind, in defiance of fashion; gay unsophisticated smiles, irradiated by health and nature; unassuming manners, and unstudied grace: such were the ornaments which these unjewelled Hebes contributed to the galaxy of charms that were displayed round Lord Hauteville's hospitable board.

"I see, Admiral, my favourite Jane has not lost those dimples I used to admire before I went abroad," said the good-natured Duchess, who had not seen the eldest Miss Gunnel since she was a child.

"No, Duchess; but she has bowled out a good deal since you saw her. I call her my spare topmast, and Isabella my sheet-anchor."

"Call them what you will, Admiral, I think they will not always keep your name," said Lord Hauteville, with a complacent smile.

"Avast! avast! my Lord: we have not put to sea above a twelvemonth, and we must not let 'em think of getting into harbour so soon. Why, Duchess, you must know my two youngest daughters are not launched yet; but Lady Hauteville told my wife she must bring your god-daughter, and then I would not leave Isabella at home alone; and so you see here we are all—hulk, masts and rigging."

"Have you heard lately from your son, Admiral?" inquired Lady Hauteville. "Where is he now?"

"He was off Navarino the last time he wrote, thrashing the Turks fore and aft, whenever he could catch them."

This observation introduced a conversation about the Greeks, in which the Duchess, Lord

Calvert, Mr. Russel, and Lord Shawe, were the principal speakers. Lord Oporto sat between Lady Harriet and Miss Gunnel; and it was hard to say which he seemed most to admire,—the highest finish that fashion could bestow, or the untutored grace of natural beauty—

When unadorn'd, adorn'd the most.

Mr. Lawson did not venture to admire the new planets. He did not know who they were, and he was always circumspect even in his praise. Not so Sir Henry Moreton. He piqued himself on being as great a connoisseur in beauty as in cookery, and he said *tous ses petits riens* to the sisters, between whom he had contrived to place himself, with but little intermission, considering the various *hors-d'œuvres* in which Mr. Sievrac absolutely surpassed himself this day.

Mr. Jessop was equally diligent in looking at Isabella, and listening to Lady Charlotte; and, upon the whole, the conversation was more

divided into *tête-à-têtes* than it had been the day before, as is always the case when any party in a country-house, who are already assimilated to each other, are broken in upon by additional visitors, whether they are exactly of the same set or not.

This evening the Duchess did not find it necessary to have recourse to her *siesta.* She really rejoiced at having an opportunity of meeting her old friend Mrs. Gunnel, who was one of the few of her present cotemporaries who could talk with her of the scenes in which her happy childhood had been passed. And who has not in some one moment of his life felt the charm of such an association? The pleasures of our early days glide noiseless by on the stream of time; but as the stronger tides of passion hurry us away from them, how often do we pause and wish that our frail bark was again in the sheltered haven we once were glad to leave? Not a light that has beamed on its waves—not a ripple that has curled its waters, that we do not remember with delight, for-

getting only the distance that has accumulated between them and us, in our long and changeful passage towards "that bourn, from whence no traveller returns." The heart must be callous indeed that has not felt the painful pleasures of such retrospection. And what are the sounds of mirth or woe, that can rouse an ear deaf to the softer tones of friendship, which come like the echo of a mermaid's song to tell the mariner of joys that were?

Lady Harriet Moreton had no friend, in its literal sense, in this society, and it was a maxim with her, never unnecessarily to multiply her acquaintances. She therefore took Miss Mortimer's arm, and with her repaired without any ceremony to her own dressing-room, where the two ladies occupied *fauteuils* at the opposite sides of the fire, their white satin shoes on the fender—their rouge, if such it might be called, defended from the "melting heat," the one by a novel, the other by a hand-screen; and thus they laughed, quizzed, and chatted about all their absent friends, but principally about

the Misses Gunnel's odd head-dresses, till the ever-attentive groom of the chambers summoned them to the saloon.

On their entrance they were somewhat surprised to find that the objects of their learned criticism had effected what perhaps others better skilled might have failed in: Lord Oporto, Mr. Jessop, Sir Henry Moreton, Mr. Lawson, Mr. Danvers, and even Old Lord Shawe, were collected round the fire-place in a group with the gay, artless, inexperienced girls, whose beauty both ladies had declared they could not admire. Even Lady Charlotte was thrown somewhat in the back-ground, though standing near them, and looked rather dignified at the unusual circumstance, whilst the innocent and brilliant girls, conscious that they meant no harm, and

guiltless of their country guile,

laughed, talked, and listened, totally unaware that they had by so doing in any degree broken through the stately etiquette of refined society.

Music was soon proposed, and seemed to meet the wishes of all. "Do you play the harp, Miss Gunnel?" inquired Lady Charlotte with an air which she meant to be condescending, but which was in fact supercilious.

"A little, but Laura plays better than I do," was the unassuming reply.

"The worst of the harp is, every girl plays it 'a little,'" observed Lady Charlotte to Mr. Lawson as he assisted her to take off the green-baize cover, preparatory to her commencing the same martial bolero in which she had accompanied her sister the night before, and which Lord Shawe again as vehemently encored.

Then came another exhibition of Miss Mortimer, and that was followed by a solo on the piano-forte; all which time the Misses Gunnel were unaffectedly delighted with their performances, and zealous in their entreaties for its continuance. At last Lady Hauteville called out in her usual dictatorial manner to request the Misses Gunnel to sing. They as little dreamed of resisting this mandate

as they had previously thought of obtruding their own performances, and accordingly sat down without affectation, and, without symphony, at once broke out in one of the most harmonious English glees that had ever been composed.

It has been said that the voice of nature is the voice of truth, and this was verified in the singing of these three sisters, which went directly to the heart of all those whose tastes were not vitiated by a sophisticated and often ignorant adoption of such rules of criticism as owe their only currency to the stamp of fashion. The Misses Gunnel's singing was as perfect in the English style as Julia Fielding's was in that of Italy—both might be equally admired, although they could never be compared. To those, therefore, who were competent judges of both, each appeared admirable; but the mere pretenders to science could scarcely be considered as competent judges of either.

The Duchess of Chester, Lord Calvert, and Mr. Russel, were enchanted with "the linked sweetness, long drawn out," and even Lady

Harriet Moreton gave the unpresuming girls that proportion of heartless praise which is most mortifying to receive. It was "really very well—wonderfully well, considering—very sweet indeed—just as she remembered having once heard Roy's Wife sung at Aberdeen." But notwithstanding all her Ladyship's very polite encomiums, she gradually retreated from the piano-forte towards the comette table, and with her drew the majority of the company, some to play it, some to learn it, and almost all to win or lose upon it.

"Are you really going away to-morrow, Lady Harriet," whispered Lord Oporto in one of the pauses of the game.

"Yes, I am sorry to say so; and, Lady Hauteville, will you make all the civils for me to Lady Tralee. I really cannot stay for her ball, as you know I have promised to meet my father in town."

"*A-propos*, Lady Harriet, do tell me who is that Mrs. Smith whom Lady Tralee has got for a companion," inquired Lady Hauteville just as

she had taxed the whole company on having played her red nine.

"Indeed I cannot tell you; but I hear she is very pretty, and very amiable, and very interesting, and all that sort of thing."

"I thought your Ladyship was the person who recommended Mrs. Smith," observed Lady Susan Danvers in surprise.

"*C'est vrai*, but I never saw her in my life. You all know poor old Mrs. Fermor, I mean the Honourable Mrs. Fermor—you know she is called the Farmer General, or Beggar of Bethnal Green, from the quantity of poor destitute females she has always on her list for preferment. I unfortunately last year got her to take some tickets off my hands for the Academy of Music——am I to deal?——and I suppose in exchange you took this Mrs. Smith off her hands?" interrupted Lady Hauteville laughing.

"Exactly—and Fitzosborne having told me a few weeks before that his mother wanted somebody between a lady and a governess to sit with Miss Betsy when her Ladyship went out

with her eldest hopes, I mentioned this person (whom I had never seen), and she took her accordingly."

"Well! if she was to be a companion to her daughter, I should certainly have inquired her character, at least, as much as I should that of my footman," observed Lady Hauteville, who was not generally inclined to judge favourably of Lord Tralee's actions.

"Her Ladyship has been very fortunate," rejoined the good-natured Mrs. Branton, who sat sideways on her chair a little behind the Viscountess. "Mrs. Smith is an excellent young woman, she comes very often to our repository, and makes a great deal of baby-linen for it."

Lady Harriet Moreton had a particular dislike to the mention of Mrs. Branton's repository and baby-linen, and instantly gave the conversation another turn.

"Do you come to town before the meeting of Parliament, Lord Calvert? I hope you do, for I am much afraid we shall be obliged

to stay in London all February, which is dreadful."

"I don't wonder your Ladyship prefers the country in spring—it is so delightful to see the first flowers," said Lady Susan in her usual mild accent.

"Why certainly, if I had my choice I would wish never to go to London before April, nor to leave it much before August," returned Lady Harriet. Lady Susan stared—the gentlemen laughed—Madame Hervey, who by the way perfectly understood English when she chose, remarked—

"Ah! j'ai bien ouï dire avant mon arrivée dans ce pays, que les hivers d'Angleterre ne finissent jamais—c'est incroyable comme ils durent."

"I agree with you, Lady Harriet," said Lord Calvert, who was one of the lookers-on that were standing round the table. "London is only bearable when it is quite full; I quite regret being obliged to go to town early this year, as I have not yet taken my seat; but I

don't think I can get away *very* soon from Paris, where I am going next week."

"Have you still your house in Portland Place, Lady Harriet?" inquired Lord Oporto in the midst of a long yawn. Till then he had amused himself by looking at Isabella Gunnel, for Lady Hauteville's card-table was much too low for him.

"Yes," returned Sir Henry Moreton somewhat pompously, "but I let it last year when we went abroad, and it must be re-painted and new-furnished before we can occupy it. I think we shall spend this spring with Lord Alton."

Sir Henry never missed an opportunity of recalling to the memory of his auditors his connexion with that nobleman; and his name having led to a long conversation on politics, between Lord Calvert, Lord Hauteville, Mr. Russel, and Mr. Danvers; the party again dispersed into separate coteries, till the appearance of the little trays gave the signal for departure.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MORNING IN TOWN.

James.—Sir, here is John Moody just come to town.

Manly.—Where is he?

James.—At our house, Sir; he has been gaping and stumping about the streets in his dirty boots, and asking every one he meets if they can tell him where he may have a good lodging for a Parliament man, till he can hire a handsome house fit for all his family for the winter.

PROVOKED HUSBAND.

THE most unpleasant circumstance attending an assemblage of guests in a country house, is the vacuum which follows the departure of any, be the proportion what it may of those who go and those who remain. Sir Henry and Lady Harriet Moreton fulfilled their intention of

leaving Hauteville the next morning, and when Lady Harriet came into the library after breakfast, wrapt up in her *vite chourra* and fur shoes, it seemed to throw quite a gloom on the company: this was, however, trifling in comparison with the general regret which was manifested when Admiral Gunnel declared his intention of returning home that day with his whole family.

"Thank ye, my Lady, thank ye kindly," replied the veteran in return for Lady Hauteville's pressing invitation to stay: "but I told my man I should be back to dinner to-day, blow high, blow low; and if we don't get home by the evening's tide, they'll think we're all swamped."

"But, Admiral, let me send a messenger to say you are all safe, and will be home to-morrow, or next day," said Mr. Danvers.

"No, that won't do either: I never break my word, if I can help it; and so, my old Lady," continued he, addressing Mrs. Gunnel, who was talking to the Duchess, "we'll take our jawing-tackle aboard, and sheer off."

Mrs. Gunnel smiled good-naturedly, and with her daughters prepared to obey the Admiral's signal. She was a woman of high birth and great acquirements, but who brought with her no dowry except her accomplishments. When she first married, they were very poor, and her younger years were almost entirely devoted to the education of her children. But no two people ever lived happier together than they did: he was, in every sense of the word, an honest, warm-hearted, blunt, English sailor. In his youth, she had preferred him for that eccentricity of manner, which in some degree characterises his profession; and in his old age, she treated him with the kindness and respect which his intrinsic merits deserved. His frank and joyous laugh was not now heard as frequent as formerly, when many a time he had whistled in the night breeze, or paced up and down the deck in the middle watch: and, perhaps, the peculiarities which in the softer mould of youth had scarcely been observable, had, in some degree, been hardened and in-

creased, as time had pressed on them. But she remembered when his smile had been her star, and his words her oracles. She loved him for what he had been, and revered him for what he was; and though the roses had waned in her own beauty, and some traces of this world's sorrows might be seen on her still placid brow, yet her voice had not lost the power to charm him; and her ready obedience to his slightest will, seemed to contribute equally to his happiness and her own.

"Devilish fine girls, upon my honour," said Lord Oporto, as soon as the Misses Gunnel were gone. "I wish, Duchess, you would persuade the old Governor to bring them out a little amongst us."

"I have asked Mrs. Gunnel to let Isabella spend next spring with me in town; but I don't think I shall be able to prevail on her to do so."

"Monstrous odd that!" said Mr. Lawson. "I should think your Grace's patronage a fine catch for the girl; I dare say you'd get them off for the old Don in no time."

"That is just what the old Admiral's afraid of," rejoined Lady Hauteville, laughing.

"I can never believe a father is averse to see his daughter married," said Lady Charlotte. "But I dare say that Mrs. Gunnel is fully aware they wouldn't do in town: she seems a sensible woman."

"Upon my word, I think they would do very well any where, begging your Ladyship's pardon," rejoined Lord Oporto.

"The Duchess of Chester would redeem anybody," observed Miss Mortimer; "and I dare say, even these young ladies would succeed under her *chaperonship*, but at present they are certainly rather countryfied."

"I think the eldest Miss Gunnel the handsomest girl I ever saw in my life, except one," observed Mr. Jessop, in his usual quiet manner.

"And who was she, may I ask?" inquired Lady Charlotte, who flattered herself she rather excelled in rallying Mr. Jessop.

"I must not confess, I suppose," he replied, "for, Miss Mortimer, she is a country girl too."

"Oh! come, let us hear!"—"Name her—name her."—"Tell us who is the fine Mr. Jessop's nonpareil!" said a variety of voices.

"Well, I will appeal to Lord Calvert if I am not right; and I think I have heard him say my nonpareil is one of the most beautiful girls in England.—I allude to Miss Fielding, Mr. Fitzosborne's bride elect."

The last epithet neutralised to Lord Calvert's ear the previous praise. With a feeling of impatience which he could not repress, he abruptly answered—"Miss Fielding is certainly very handsome, but I think it almost impossible for any woman to be handsomer than Miss Gunnel."

"A Daniel! a very Daniel!" exclaimed Lord Oporto: "you steered well between them, Calvert, as old Bowsprit would say."

"I am delighted to hear that Fitzosborne has made so good a choice," replied the Duchess. "I suppose we shall have the bride in town this year. *A propos*, Calvert, you should know all about it. I forgot that Fitzosborne was

your particular friend: do tell me how soon the marriage is to take place?"

"I assure your Grace I never heard of it till the other day here:" and so saying, he rose and left the room.

The conversation now became desultory. Lady Charlotte continued to torment Mr. Jessop, till even his imperturbability gave way, and he declared, with greater emphasis than ever, that "if Miss Fielding ever came to town, she would cut out the present *soi-disant belles* all to nothing."

"Miss Mortimer continued her pretty little attentions to Lord Shawe. Mr. Lawson divided his between the Duchess and Lord Calvert. Mr. Russel paid his compliments to the former, but assiduously cultivated the friendship of the latter; foreseeing, as he told Lord Hauteville, that he was one of those rising men to whom England would some day look for marked pre-eminence. Madame Hervey ingratiated herself with Lady Hauteville, by her sudden attachment to children. Lord

Oporto and Major Hervey won and lost at billiards. Mrs. Branton assiduously devoted herself to Lady Susan; and Mr. Danvers fairly beat the Duchess out of the field at chess. Thus, in a few hours, each forgot the absent in the prosecution of their different schemes for their own amusement or advantage. Before dinner, a fresh set of visitors replaced those who had so lately been admired, regretted, and forgotten; and thus the hours and days continued to roll on in that epitome of the world, where individuality of character was lost, or at least concealed beneath the uniform mask of politeness and etiquette, and where but one genuine sentiment seemed to prevail—a desire of passing the present moment agreeably, and forgetting all else beside.

One by one, however, the whole party dropped off. The dinner-table decreased in size day by day. The large, dark, damask drawing-room was deserted first, for the library, and latterly for Lady Hauteville's bright *boudoir*. At last, the happy family-party alone

remained: the large Indian screens, that had stood in stately pride beside the sideboards, now unfolded their grotesque and gilded sides, to enclose the little table *en petit couvert.* Mr. Buller and all his myrmidons were transplanted to the anti-room; and the substantial dumb waiters supplied the place of their equally inaudible predecessors. The laughing, rosy children, again scrambled on grandpapa's knee after dinner: and at tea-time, the groom of the chambers was allowed to bring his salvers and his *aides-de-camp* into the warm and cheerful *boudoir,* instead of issuing his invitations to the now deserted saloon.

Thus happily uniting the seemingly incompatible pleasures of splendour and comfort, the family at Hauteville perceived the time had arrived that was fixed for their journey to London, with unmixed feelings of regret; all but Lady Charlotte Hargrove and the children. They saw with equal delight, arising from far different motives, the bustle of preparation commence: and about the time when Lady

Susan Danvers, as she said, would like to *return* to the country to see the first flowers blow, the shades of Hauteville were deserted for the "shady side" of Portman Square.

The meeting of Parliament had drawn several families to London some weeks earlier than usual. Amongst others, that of Sir James Weldon, whose vigilant helpmate lived so much in dread of being behind the fashion in any thing, that she had contrived to work up her whole household to town, even before the given number of members could be found in the deserted metropolis to constitute a British senate.

Of course they drove to one of the most expensive hotels in the west end of the town. It would be derogatory to the dignity of Lady Weldon to consider economy in any thing. Of course the hotel was full: it would be derogatory to the dignity of any hotel in that quarter to admit any visitor that was not "bespoke:" it would imply a possibility of the hotel not being crammed full, even at that empty season.

The next process, therefore, was to be bandied round the whole circle;—Burlington, Reed's, St. George's, Fladong's, Warren's, Thomas's, Brunswick, Warne's. All were tried in turn; and at last, tired and cross, they were humanely "taken in" at the one where they first applied,—a family having, "quite unexpectedly," vacated a large suite of apartments in the interim.

Certainly Shenstone was right: every one has found "his warmest welcome in an inn:" not in the large, dark, dirty, splendid, caravanseras in other countries; but in the bright, clean, comfortable hostelries of London. The candles are lighted with such despatch; the table is laid with such alacrity; the bill of fare is so admirably divided into fish, flesh, and fowl; the first dish is so well and pompously put on, either by the landlord or his representative: who would not encounter the splashing —the noise—the weariness of travelling, to find such a solace for his cares at his journey's end?

But with the ladies of Sir James Weldon's

family the cares of the journey were but just commenced. First, job-horses must be procured to convey Lady Weldon to every different house patronised by every different agent. Then the young ladies had to procure shoemakers, staymakers, hairdressers, mantua-makers, milliners. Additional servants were to be hired; an opera-box engaged, or at least inquired about. Then after a fortnight's agitation, some houses being found too dear, others too cheap, some too near Regent Street, some too far off, a lawyer being employed to break one bad bargain, another to conclude a better; after these, and ten thousand similar miseries had been surmounted, Lady Weldon, at the beginning of spring, wrote to her dear friend, Mrs. Masham, that, "thank God! they were at last comfortably settled for the winter."

O! ye fixed stars of fashion! who silently as brilliantly revolve in your own splendid orbits, above the earthly torments of the sphere below—ye, who are found in your own places year after year amongst the constellations to whom all

look up! little know ye of the toils and cares, and woes, and wishes, of those who humbly follow in your luminous track: to you, indeed, may be said or sung—

> Ye gentlemen of fashion, who live at home at ease,
> O! little do ye think upon such miseries as these.

The next trouble which fell to Lady Weldon's share was that of forming her visiting list. To effect this, that *manuel de la bonne compagnie*, that little talisman with a red face, which, like the knocker of a hall door, is in every body's hands, from the footman to the duke—and, like the same useful appendage, is only resorted to for the purpose of obtaining ingress to the mansions of the great; that compendium of useful knowledge—that catalogue *raisonnée* of the *beau monde*—that indispensable addenda to modern households—in short, that annual blessing, which in vulgar words is denominated "Court Guide," was zealously resorted to, and the cards intrusted to those

obliging personages who circulate them for some "trifling remuneration," duly attending to the mystical signs in the corners of those received in return, as designated by the large letters S or C.

By the help of these and such other legitimate sources of information as came within her reach, Lady Weldon discovered amongst the fashionable arrivals, the names of "the Earl and Countess of Ellesmere, and the Ladies Calvert, at the family mansion in St. James's Square," and thither Lady Weldon and her daughters proceeded accordingly.

This "family mansion in St. James's Square" had belonged to the Earls of Ellesmere in those good old times when His Majesty of blessed memory manfully sat on his horse in the middle of a duck-pond; nor had it often been occupied, at least by the ladies of the family, since winding walks and odoriferous shrubs had superseded the taste for gold and silver fish and chicken weed. The inside of the house was less changed than the view from the win-

dows; for, in regard to its furniture, fashion seemed to have run round the circle, and arrived precisely at the spot from whence she started; inasmuch as the japanned cabinets, Indian screens, Turkey carpets, China beakers, massive chairs, buhl tables, and musical clocks, were again the *goût du jour:* even the window curtains were made as heretofore of flowered damask, and hung up with as little drapery as in the time of Lord Ellesmere's great-great-grandmother; and nothing seemed absolutely *outré,* except the high-shouldered marble chimney pieces; whilst an air of quiet but substantial grandeur pervaded the whole establishment, from the coroneted sedan-chair that stood in the corner of the entrance-hall, to carry my Lady to St. James's, up to the dark, narrow, massive mahogany doors that opened into the drawing-rooms, in awful contrast to their wide, white-painted, folding brethren, that are usually found in every house of modern structure.

"I declare I could fancy myself going into

the dismal old-fashioned library at Ellesmere," whispered Anna Weldon, as she strided two steps at a time up the flat, broad, square staircase, with its ponderous bannisters, noiseless carpets, and brown Holland slips. But the observation was unheeded; for Lady Weldon had arrived out of breath at the landing-place, and Miss Weldon was entirely engrossed in settling her large hat, which had been pushed crooked as she descended from her carriage.

On entering the farthest drawing-room, the Countess received Lady Weldon, just the same as she would have done in the country; a circumstance which deserves to be recorded for its singularity: Lady Weldon was not, however, much used to London usages, and therefore lost a good opportunity of being surprised.

Lady Matilda had apparently been reading, for an open book lay beside her; but at the moment of their entrance she had laid it aside, and was engaged in conversation with an elderly gentleman, who was sitting in an arm-chair at the opposite side of the fire-place. Lady

Louisa was employed at her embroidery of ribands, and a handsome young man of very fashionable appearance was placed near her, who frequently spoke to Lady Ellesmere, but much oftener looked at the sparkling eyes of her youngest daughter.

"When did you come to town? Where have you got your house? How long has Sir James been laid up in the gout?" These, and a few other such important queries were soon despatched; and then a pause ensued, such as always occurs when one party of morning visitors drop in to interrupt the conversation, and disturb the ideas of another party, who were utterly unknown to them.

"Were you at the opera last Tuesday, Lady Louisa?" said the younger gentleman, as he passed the palm of his white hand, garnished by a scarcely whiter wristband, across the back of his jetty curls.

"No; mamma has not yet succeeded in getting a box; but I believe she is promised one."

"You forget, Louisa, that I have so long

been off Mr. Ebers's list, that I have but little hopes of his remembering me."

"I took care to write to him," observed Lady Weldon, "a fortnight before I left the country, and though I have not got a definitive answer from him, yet I am certain he has taken care of *me*."

"La! mamma, you know Lady Harriet Moreton told us she would speak to him when she came to town, so we cannot be disappointed."

Both gentlemen turned to look at the fair speaker, and, as Anna afterwards observed to her sister, "she was very glad indeed that she had on her new pelisse."

"Are you as fond of music, Lady Matilda, as your friend Julia Fielding is?" inquired the elder gentleman—but before she had time to reply, Lady Weldon interrupted her.

"Oh! Lady Matilda, I forgot to tell you I saw poor Miss Fielding at church the Sunday before I came from Fairton, and I am sorry to say I think she is grown very thin."

Lady Louisa dropped her needle, and jumped

rather than turned round on her chair, to look full in Lady Weldon's face. Lady Matilda blushed and gave a deep sigh, but made no observation; her eyes were turned on the ground, whilst those of the elder gentleman were fixed upon her face. Lady Ellesmere was the only one who spoke.

"You surprise me, Lady Weldon; I had a letter from the dear girl a few days ago that seemed to be written in excellent spirits, and she made no mention of her being unwell."

"Perhaps it was her dress that did not become her," observed Miss Weldon in a tone of perfect indifference.

"Do you know, Lady Louisa, it is reported she is going to be married to Mr. Fitzosborne, who was at Ellesmere last summer?" and as Anna Weldon said, this she looked rather sharply at her friend.

"Yes, indeed, Captain Brisbane told me yesterday it was all settled," rejoined Miss Weldon with no less meaning in her countenance.

"I thought, Lady Louisa, Mr. Fitzosborne's

long visit at Ellesmere was made with other intentions," remarked Lady Weldon with significant emphasis. Lady Louisa coloured.

"Mr. Fitzosborne is a very fine young man," observed Lady Ellesmere with gravity, "but I should have thought if Julia Fielding's marriage with him is certain, we should have heard it through other channels."

"I assure you it was publicly spoken of at Hauteville last Christmas," said Mr. Russel, for he it was who sat near Lady Louisa, and now looked rather inquisitively at her increasing blushes.

"Do *you* believe that report?" meanwhile whispered the other gentleman to Lady Matilda. She turned her large and beautiful eyes towards her interrogator, but they were glazed with tears: however, in a moment or two she answered in the same low tone, "God knows! I hardly know what to believe."

At that moment the servant entered with some visiting-cards in his hand, and inquired, "would my Lady be at home to Lady Tralee

and the Misses Fitzosborne?" The answer was an assent; and the two gentlemen, taking that opportunity of concluding their visit, left the room.

The Misses Weldon lost not a moment in telling Lady Louisa in a whisper, that both Captain Brisbane and Major Crosbie were in town, for they had seen them at the bazaar in Leicester Fields. Lady Weldon observed to the Countess how very *à propos* her Ladyship's visit was, as she was exceedingly anxious to get introduced to her: and Lady Matilda, drawing her fine figure to its utmost altitude, left the side of the fire-place as the post of honour, and retired to the couch at the back of her sister's work-frame.

Lady Tralee and her daughters were on that degree on the ladder of fashion, which may be considered a side-way step,—where the nicest circumspection is required to prevent falling, and nothing gives a chance of stability but presence of mind, and a total indifference to every person below. When they entered Lady

Ellesmere's drawing-room, although they had never before seen one of the personages it contained, they were perfectly at ease: Lady Tralee marched up to the Countess, made a silent curtsey, or rather bow; then took possession of the seat which Lady Matilda had vacated, turned her back to the wall, lifted up the blonde curtain of her bonnet, held her chinchilly muff between her and the fire, and leisurely commenced a survey of the company.

Her Ladyship was accompanied by her two eldest daughters. Miss Fitzosborne, in imitation of her mother, stalked to the fire-place, and having seated herself in the opposite *fauteuil*, took up her spy-glass as if to take an inventory of the furniture. Miss Fanny placed herself in a chair between the two Misses Weldon, who instantly turned towards her, looked very conversable, and soon after found an opportunity of commencing an acquaintance, by talking of Kensington Gardens.

Lady Ellesmere was quite at a loss what to say to her new guest, who seemed waiting for

the Countess to begin the conversation. Her attitude and manner were not prepossessing; she thought how very unlike they all were to Mr. Fitzosborne; and fortunately that reminiscence served her for a text with which to commence the discourse. She therefore very pompously inquired for Lionel.

"Very well, I thank you, when we last heard. We expect to see him soon; but just now he is shooting in Scotland, I believe."

Another silence. It was Lady Tralee's turn to make an effort. "I met two gentlemen going down stairs, and the youngest bowed to me as I passed, but I declare I quite forget his name; may I ask your Ladyship what it is?"

"The younger was Mr. Russel," answered Lady Ellesmere.

"Oh! dear! yes, I remember. You know, Maria, we met him at Lord Hauteville's; I suppose the other is his father?" continued Lady Tralee.

"The elder of the two was Lord Alton," calmly replied the Countess.

"Lord Alton!" "Bless me! Lord Alton!" "Indeed! Lord Alton?" exclaimed the ladies in different notes of exclamation.

"Dear me! I am quite shocked. What did I say, Lady Ellesmere, about Lady Harriet Moreton, and Julia Fielding? I hope I did not say any thing wrong about our *dear* Julia Fielding?" and in Lady Weldon's anxiety to exculpate herself towards Lord Alton, she totally forgot that Lady Tralee was still present. But her Ladyship was engrossed with her own thoughts, as all those must be who have difficult cards to play. At last she observed—

"I am quite glad to see Lord Alton looking so well. I must write and tell my friend Lady Harriet Moreton that I have had the pleasure of meeting her father."

A new link for the desired acquaintance, thought Lady Weldon. So she drawled out in a semi-sick voice, "Is your Ladyship acquainted with Lady Harriet Moreton? She is a great friend of mine—charming woman."

Lady Tralee bowed, "May I ask who I have the honour of speaking to?"

Lady Ellesmere took the hint, and introduced Lady Weldon to her Ladyship, who instantly recollected, as she mentioned to her, "having heard the Marchioness of Coleraine speak of Lady Weldon and her daughters—had she lately come to town? Where might she do herself the honour of waiting on her?"

In all this, Lady Tralee was perfectly guileless; she did really remember having heard Lady Coleraine mention Lady Weldon's name as a friend of Lady Harriet Moreton, but she totally forgot in what terms. And as Lady Tralee was anxious to have as many people of rank at her parties as she could by any means collect, she flattered herself she had made, what in her own private phraseology she termed an excellent hit. She therefore overloaded Lady Weldon with condescension and civilities; promised to call at Ebers's, and speak to him about the opera-box; took down the number of Lady Weldon's house in Lower Grosvenor Street; and having thanked Lady Ellesmere with more form than gratitude for her politeness to her

son, made a formal *congé* to the Ladies Calvert, and with her two daughters retired.

"What a formal piece of goods that Lady Ellesmere is!" observed Miss Fitzosborne as soon as the restraint of her presence was removed; "I don't wonder Lady Harriet called her a petrifaction. Well, mamma, I cannot think why you visited her."

"I am sure she will never be in Lady Hauteville's set," exclaimed Miss Jenny, consoling herself with a loud yawn for the durance vile in which she had passed the last half-hour.

"Girls, you know nothing about it," sapiently remarked her Ladyship of Tralee. "Your father particularly desired me to call on them on account of Lord Calvert; and Lionel in his very last letter charged us not to omit cultivating them."

"At all events we have got acquainted with Lady Weldon, that is one good thing," observed Jenny.

"And we met Lord Alton and Mr. Russel. Oh! I declare there is Lord Oporto, and that

stupid Mr. Danvers," continued Miss Fitzosborne: and the anxiety to recognise other beaux, suspended all further critiques upon poor Lady Ellesmere.

Meanwhile, Lady Weldon and her daughters returned home in a fine flutter of joy: but, unfortunately, Sir James was more cross than ever. "What the devil can have kept you out so long? It's past seven o'clock, and dinner has been waiting these two hours and more."

"Pray don't speak so loud, Sir James," retorted Lady Weldon, throwing her whole figure *bien déployée* on a couch; "really my nerves cannot stand it."

"Stand a fiddle-stick, ma'am; I say I want my dinner:" and the choleric Baronet flew to the bell, which he rung with considerable energy. Just then Anna burst into the room, exclaiming—"Oh! pa, I have such good news to tell you; I am sure we shall get our opera-box at last."

"Opera-box! nonsense!" rejoined Sir

James. "I tell you I'm more than half ruined already. Why this house costs more than the whole farm of Thistledown is let for."

In his zeal, the worthy gentleman knocked his gouty toe against the protruding head of the bright steel fire-tongs that lay upon the fender. Tongs, poker, and shovel, rattled down on the lackered fender-board with accumulated uproar. Sir James shrieked—nay, swore with pain. Lady Weldon stopped both her ears. Anna Weldon laughed. The lap-dog crept from off the hearth-rug, and begun a noise betwixt a whine and a yell. In the midst of the confusion, the long-expected dinner was announced: and to that refreshment the well-regulated family repaired to find solace in cold fish, over-roasted mutton, and smoked vegetables.

CHAPTER IX.

THE OPERA-BOX.

Give place, ye ladies, and be gone;
Boast not yourselves at all,
For here at hand approacheth one,
Whose face will stain you all.
LORD VAUX—ANCIENT POETRY.

THE next morning, Lord and Lady Ellesmere and their daughters had scarcely finished breakfast, when the Countess was informed that Lord Alton's "own man" was down stairs, and wished to deliver a message from his Lordship in person. The far-famed Mr. Brinley was accordingly desired to be shown in, and

that double-distilled gentleman made his appearance: the good old Earl was almost tempted to rise, in return to his pompous salutation, so infinitely did the valet transcend his master in all the "pomp and circumstance" of foppery.

The man's finery was, however, confined to his appearance. He had been too long Lord Alton's confidential servant not to be a good one in every sense of the word; although he certainly had the foible to believe, and even to profess, that his own master was superior in every thing to all the world beside. Having delivered a note to Lady Ellesmere, he retired a few steps to await her Ladyship's commands; not, however, without taking *en passant* a most incurious survey of the two young ladies.

The note contained but few words. Lord Alton merely stated — "that Mr. Ebers had that morning offered his Lordship two opera-boxes, and having heard her Ladyship say she was not yet provided with one, he sent Brinley not only to give her the choice of either, but

also to take her Ladyship's orders for the conclusion of any arrangement she pleased to make: adding, that if he might venture to name so homely a thing as a family dinner in London, he would take the liberty of proposing that Lord and Lady Ellesmere, and the two young ladies, should take their soup with him the next day (Saturday), and they could then, all together, judge of the merits of the boxes Mr. Ebers so strongly recommended."

Nothing could be more agreeable to the whole party than this proposition. Lord Ellesmere had long been slightly acquainted with Lord Alton, and their rapidly increasing intimacy had heightened their mutual esteem for each other. Lady Louisa absolutely forgot the presence of the renowned Mr. Brinley, and, jumping up from her chair, made two or three *coupées* before Lady Ellesmere reminded her that she should think of other things besides an opera-box. Lady Matilda was, perhaps, the most pleased of any of the party, as she always frankly acknowledged that Lord Alton's con-

versation was to her infinitely more agreeable than that of any other person. But Mr. Brinley was not then let into that confidence: he merely received the Countess's directions respecting the opera-box, and a note from Lady Matilda, written in her mother's name, signifying their willing acceptance of the Earl's invitation to a family dinner.

The intervening hours absolutely appeared interminable to poor Lady Louisa, who had never been at an opera; and from Julia's animated description of those she had seen abroad, she believed it to be an improved edition of Paradise. Yet these hours passed as most do in London, which bring to view an incessant succession of new faces, if passed out of the house, and as incessant a succession of trifling occupations, if spent at home. At last, the happy moment arrived. The hair-dresser was announced along with the carriage that was to convey Lord Ellesmere to the House of Lords.

The affairs of the nation and the business of the toilet occupied about the same time; and

as Lord Alton's house was in Privy Gardens, the Countess and her daughters met Lord Ellesmere at the gateway, and they all proceeded together through the magnificent suite of apartments, at the termination of which they found Lord Alton waiting to receive them in a small but beautiful library.

Mr. Russel was the only addition to their party; and although this was the first time Lord Ellesmere had ever been in Lord Alton's house, his courtly, and at the same time friendly manners, removed all appearance of form or embarrassment.

The beauty and singular research displayed in the ornaments of the room they sat in, formed at first the subject of the conversation. It was an octagon room, and more peculiar even in the taste and elegance of its furniture than in its shape. "Does this room at all remind you of the library at the *dear* rectory?" inquired Lord Alton, and he addressed Lady Matilda with an animated expression of countenance as he thus alluded to their first meeting.

"It really does resemble it," answered Lady Matilda, again looking round with increased pleasure; adding, "If there was only the river and woods of Fairton, I could fancy myself there."

"I hope to have the pleasure of showing your Ladyship in day-light that I too boast of river-scenery, as nothing intervenes between that window and the Thames except my own garden. But I think this next room will remind you, Lady Matilda, still more of the rectory." So saying, he opened a side-door, and the next moment Julia Fielding was in her arms.

The surprise which Lord Alton had kindly designed, as of unmixed pleasure to Lady Matilda, produced a joy almost amounting to pain. But a few tears, and many kisses, at last restored the whole party to more unmixed happiness. Lady Louisa, in her joy, hung round Mr. Fielding's neck, (for he had accompanied his daughter,) as a playful fondling child, and thanked him, again and again, for her happi-

ness; whilst Lady Matilda's thanks were directed to Lord Alton—silently, it is true, and but by looks; yet they were not less eloquent than those of her more vivacious sister.

It is in such moments of excited feelings that character is best displayed. But this was not, however, the first time in which Lord Alton had discovered, in that of Lady Matilda, a deep and high-wrought sensibility concealed under a mild equanimity of behaviour, and regulated by the uncompromising dictates of a sound judgment. He admired the fervency of affection with which both the Ladies Calvert seemed to love their friend, whilst he felt proud of the lovely girl, whose charms and virtues had gained the esteem of such kindred minds. With eyes glistening with an almost paternal regard, he gazed on Julia, as she stood with Lady Ellesmere and her daughters, scarcely knowing how to express her love to each and all; and as the little group thus instantaneously seemed united in one community of feeling, domestic happiness appeared again,

for an instant, to shed her hallowed beam on the hearth of him who best knew how to deserve and appreciate the boon.

The dinner presented a singular union of magnificence and comfort. Numberless servants lined the intervening rooms, from the library to the dining-room; but after the first arrangements were made, the majority of the attendants were dismissed, and none remained to interrupt the intimacy of conversation except two or three of those who were out of livery, and had for many years been accustomed to that privilege.

Of course, a long explanation took place as to Julia's unexpected appearance in London; but, in this explanation, each concealed some one motive which had contributed, in the aggregate, to the happiness of the passing moment.

Mr. Fielding did *not* tell that his anxiety respecting his adored child's health and spirits had induced him to accept Lord Alton's invitation to her, in hopes that change of scene might be of use to both.

Julia did *not* tell, that as she found it impossible entirely to evade the wishes of her father, and the solicitations of her uncle, she had fixed the time of her obedience to them at the precise period when she knew, from Lady Matilda's letters, that Lord Calvert was at Paris.

Lord Alton had many motives that he did not choose to avow, though none he need have been ashamed to own. One of the most imperative was, an earnest and disinterested anxiety for Julia's happiness, for whom his affection was more than ever confirmed by her likeness to her mother.

In his conversations with Mr. Fielding at Alton Forest, he had imbibed a belief that his niece's marriage with Lord Calvert was more than probable; but the Earl's *fort* was penetration. He had discovered in his transient visit to the rectory that some impediments had arisen to this connexion, and having heard from Mr. Russel the reports of Fitzosborne's attachment to Julia, which accidental circum-

stances had confirmed, he attributed her declining health, of which Mr. Fielding had informed him, to the not improbable cause that her affections were devoted to Lionel, whilst the marriage with Lord Calvert was pressed forward solely by the wishes of Lord Ellesmere and Mr. Fielding.

To have an opportunity of thoroughly understanding not only his niece's character, but her feelings, to contribute to her happiness in whatever was in his power, and at all events to rescue her from the misery of an unwilling marriage;—such were the plans of this benevolent man; and if any ulterior considerations, either for his own happiness or the respectability of Lady Harriet Moreton lent their weight to the scale, still the beam only vibrated to those better feelings which in themselves add true dignity to human nature.

Meantime Mr. Russel, who was really flattered by Lord Alton having admitted him into so select a party, exerted all his talents to be agreeable, and in the amicable contention of

gay and animated conversation, it was difficult to say which was the most vivacious, most elegant, and most profound, Lord Alton or his young *protégé*.

Mr. Russel's father had been one of the Earl's first and dearest friends, who, leaving the boy an orphan at an early age, intrusted his fortune and his character to Lord Alton. The effect of his Lordship's care on both was soon visible: his character was already looked up to even in the brilliant hemisphere in which his patron moved, and his fortune had accumulated under his management to an almost incredible fructification. His paternal estates, which had been left to him involved, being now redeemed, and his annual income more than exceeding the usual patrimony of his equals, Mr. Russel continually asserted that Lord Alton had contributed more than mere attention to this surprising improvement in his finances. But if he did, no traces of his generosity were allowed to exist, except in its effects; and so far from the Earl assuming any such merit to himself, he

continually adduced the circumstance as proof of what can be done in pecuniary matters by uninterrupted and methodical arrangement: meanwhile, Mr. Russel as pertinaciously, and far more proudly asserted, that in any case his obligations to Lord Alton could never be cancelled, not even by his gratitude.

At last the dinner, pleasant as it was, terminated. Lady Matilda declared that Lady Ellesmere had never risen from table so soon: Lady Louisa thought only that the move brought them one degree nearer the opera: and what did Julia Fielding think? that with such kind and such beloved friends, she could be—almost—happy any where. Besides, she had come to London with the determination to devote herself to the passing scene: she had willingly, if not zealously, received, on that morning, directions from, rather than given directions to, the mantua-makers and milliners, which her ever attentive uncle had provided for her through the agency of Lady Harriet Moreton; for all had combined to keep from Lord Ellesmere

the pre-concerted secret of her arrival the night before: and she now with pardonable vanity, and many a smile and blush, received the praises of her more than mother on the whole arrangement of her toilet.

Nor were those praises only the expressions of partiality; for even Mr. Russel declared to Lady Louisa, that much as he had heard of Miss Fielding's beauty, it far surpassed his expectations. Perhaps, however, he only said this to mark the animated delight of Lady Louisa's countenance as he made the remark; for he too was a physiognomist. But be that as it may, although Julia was assuredly grown thinner, yet, owing either to the accidental exhilaration of her spirits, or to the peculiar becomingness of her dress, she never looked more lovely than she did that evening.

In a much shorter time than even Lady Louisa expected, the gentlemen returned to the drawing-room; and scarcely was the coffee despatched when, infinitely to Lady Louisa's delight, she heard the discussion commence as

to how the party was to be conveyed to the Haymarket. Lord Alton's coach was in waiting; but it was impossible for Julia, as she averred, to go in it without another lady: it was therefore determined, that Lady Matilda should accompany her in it, along with Lord Alton and Mr. Fielding; and Mr. Russel having taken her place in Lady Ellesmere's carriage, they at last found themselves quietly seated in the centre box of the second tier.

Not one of the ladies were aware of the incongruity of four ladies appearing together in one opera-box, and that too the very best box Mr. Ebers had to bestow; nor even, perhaps, had they guessed at the solecism in fashion which they had so unknowingly committed, would any of the party have willingly resigned even one of her companions. Lady Ellesmere desired Lady Louisa and Julia to take the two front places; both offered to resign them to Lady Matilda, but she positively averred her preference to a back seat; and Lady Louisa threw so comical an expression into her coun-

tenance as she obeyed the Countess's orders, that Lady Matilda blushed till the tears almost swam in her eyes; but in a few minutes the curtain drew up, and for the remainder of the evening their attention was almost exclusively devoted to the stage and all its witcheries.

Julia's passion was music; and the opera she now heard was one with which she was perfectly familiar, and in the best airs of which she herself excelled. She had often sung them to Lord Calvert; and whilst her eyes were rivetted on the actors, and the silence of attention hung on her half-opening lips, not a turn of the harmony, not an incident of the scene, but seemed to be reflected in her changing colour and speaking countenance. Italy—where only she had heard such strains as those—came on her memory in sorrow, like the soft murmur of the southern breeze; and, abstracted from the present scene by its own perfection, she thought only of those whom she had most determined to forget. But when the brilliant ballet succeeded to the harmony of Rossini, and she felt

herself released, as it were, from her trance, and at leisure to look around her, what was her surprise at finding that she herself had been the object of not less intense anxiety and attraction! A few of the demagogues of fashion, whose fiat is irreversible as that of fate, had first observed her peerless beauty; and group after group of darkling beaux had in turn stationed themselves in the alley of the pit to pass judgment on the new star of the night.

"Who is she?—Who can she be?—Where did she come from?—Who is she with?" These and a hundred such exclamations were heard occasionally; and there was scarcely a box that did not, sooner or later, serve as an ambush from which telescopes of every size and form were directed towards the centre box. Lady Ellesmere was scarcely known in London; and one or two of the exquisites had consequently pronounced that Julia was nobody, when most fortunately that awful sentence was suspended by the opportune appearance of Mr. Russel's

black head, who just then leant forward to speak to Lady Louisa; and the ultimate sentence as to Julia's pretensions to be, or not to be, was postponed till a reference could be had to his despotic authority: for Lord Alton, who was the only other individual who could have redeemed the party, was seated quite in the back-ground, beside Lady Matilda.

The moment Julia became at all conscious that any person was looking at her, she hastily turned her head away, on the pretence of looking to the other side of the house; but in so doing, her eyes fell on Lionel Fitzosborne, who, silent and motionless, had stood gazing intently on her for some minutes. She would have again raised her eyes, as if to look past without recognising him; but, instantaneous as her look had been, he caught and returned it with an almost reverential bow: at the same instant, Lady Louisa perceived him, and touching Julia with her fan to point him out to her notice, "I declare," said she, "there's our friend, Mr. Fitzosborne;" and she, at the same time, bowed

to him with a gay and gracious smile. Julia now found it impossible to avoid recognising him, though she did so with an emotion she scarcely could conceal.

"I was not aware, Julia, you had any acquaintances in London," observed Lord Alton, who happened to have noticed her embarrassed salutation. She mentioned to whom she had bowed; but before further explanation could take place, the scene closed—the box-door opened—and Lionel himself appeared to pay his compliments to the ladies, and to offer his assistance in conducting them to their carriages.

Too well did Lionel know the value of this accidental meeting, which at once had removed all doubt at least, if not embarrassment, in the renewal of his acquaintance with Miss Fielding; and determined was his resolution never to relinquish a prize which, thus so unexpectedly presented to his view, seemed of added value. At first, his compliments were solely addressed to Lady Ellesmere: for Lady Matilda had haughtily returned his bow; and Julia and Lady

Louisa were still in the front of the box. Mr. Fielding, who was totally unconscious of all that had passed between him and Julia, received him with the same frank cordiality with which they had parted when he left him at Ellesmere; and recollecting his former anxiety to become acquainted with Lord Alton, the good-natured Rector, without further preface, presented him to his Lordship, who received him with a gracious bow, but a keen and scrutinizing glance.

Thus did Lionel once more, by a single turn of chance, obtain two of those objects which he was most solicitous to secure. Julia's renewal of their acquaintance had been witnessed not only by the public, but by her own family; and he had at once, and without machination, procured that introduction to Lord Alton, which he had sought so long in vain. A man less confident in his own talents might, in Lionel's place, have deemed himself the master of his destiny; but the triumph which throbbed at his heart betrayed itself not on his placid countenance. The beau-

tiful lip, which a Perseus might have owned, curled in no smile of pride; and the placid brow bore no trace but that of deep reflection.

The only salutation which passed between Lionel and Mr. Russel, was a silent shake by the hand, and an arch expression in the countenance of the latter, which Fitzosborne scarcely wished to remove, explained as it was by the accompanying action; for Mr. Fielding, who had left them to inquire after their carriages, now returned to announce that they were at the private entrance, and would be up the next but one. Mr. Russel, with no unintelligible glance from Fitzosborne to Julia, offered his arm to Lady Louisa, and the rest having passed through the box-door, no alternative was left to Julia but that of accepting Fitzosborne's protection.

Lady Ellesmere, unaccustomed to London crowds, was fearful of losing her carriage, and hastened forwards leaning on her Lord; but as neither of them were well acquainted with the avenues of the Opera-house, Lord Alton and

Lady Matilda went before them; Lady Louisa and Mr. Russel followed; and Julia, leaning on Fitzosborne's arm, came immediately after them, escorted also by her father.

Of course, Fitzosborne had not an opportunity, even had he wished it, to have said any thing in particular to Julia: but his looks were but too intelligible; and she almost trembled when they were pushed a little aside from the rest of the party, to make way for a lady who was advancing rapidly, attended by a host of beaux. Julia was so much incommoded as they passed, that she had no opportunity of noticing the lady's figure, till she was startled by the words —"The Countess Montalvina's carriage"— "here"—"drive on:" and hastily leaning forward, she was just in time to see a very beautiful woman, sparkling in jewels, put her head out of the carriage-window to kiss hands to the gentleman from whom she had just parted. The next moment, the cocked-hats and gold-headed canes of her two footmen were seen up behind; and the sound of "Lord Alton's car-

riage stops the way," and "Lady Ellesmere's carriage stops the way," having announced their successive appearance, under the brilliant lamps, in a few moments Julia found herself seated with her father and her uncle, returning to the solitary grandeur of her own apartment at Lord Alton's, and almost regretting that she was not to accompany Mr. Fielding on his return to the rectory, which was fixed for the following day.

CHAPTER X.

A MORNING LOUNGE.

Trust him not; his words, tho' sweet,
Seldom with his heart do meet;
All his practice is deceit.

BEN JONSON.

A NEW horizon seemed now to open on Fitzosborne's view: to be suddenly restored to Julia's society, and that too with the public sanction of her father, and the implied approbation of Lord Alton—for so he translated his introduction to his Lordship—were circumstances almost beyond his hopes; and when he returned into the waiting-room, he scarcely endeavoured to conceal his triumph, as he

affected to reject the congratulations offered to him both by Lord Oporto and Mr. Russel, and others of the same set. Uncertain as to the origin of the reports of his engagement with Miss Fielding, he, in the exhilaration of the moment, considered their circulation as an additional proof that his intentions were not only understood, but even approved by her family; and he returned home to ruminate not only on the past success, but also to arrange his plans for the better certainty of the ultimate confirmation of his hopes.

He was aware that two obstacles yet remained for him to surmount: the first was a jealousy on the part of Lady Harriet Moreton, which his vanity at least taught him to expect; and the second was Julia's attachment to Lord Calvert, of which he had early made the discovery at Ellesmere. Of Lord Calvert's own feelings he was perfectly careless, as he considered him, and not without reason, completely in his power.

A wakeful night sufficed to methodize all

his designs; and his first occupation in the morning, was to write a long and confidential letter to Lady Harriet Moreton. From what had dropped both from Lord Oporto and Mr. Russel, he was aware that Lady Harriet had already heard the report of his marriage with Miss Fielding, at Lord Hauteville's; and therefore, making a merit of necessity, he prefaced his letter by asking her advice, as "his friend —his guide—the polar star of all his destiny."

He affected to be vehemently urged to the match by Lord Tralee; and in this he scarcely exaggerated: he then mentioned, with apparent ingenuousness, his surprise at meeting Miss Fielding the night before at the Opera, and his still greater astonishment at the "anxiety evinced by Lord Alton for his acquaintance." From that he contrived artfully to introduce a surmise, that the conduct of Lord Tralee, Lord Alton, and even of Mr. Fielding, might give rise to a report of his paying his addresses to her; and, as far as mere report went, he should rejoice in its circulation, as it would not only

mortify the Ellesmeres, who, with the exception of his dear friend Calvert, he hated as much as Lady Harriet did. But the report would also facilitate his admission to Lord Alton's house during her Ladyship's stay there, which otherwise he feared would not be agreeable either to his Lordship or Sir Henry Moreton. He then confided to her, under the seal of secrecy, his utter dislike to the match, not so much from any prejudice against the girl herself, as from an abhorrence of matrimony, arising from the painfully pleasing remembrance of his first and only love; inferred with infinite dexterity the advantages to Lady Harriet that might arise from his marriage with her cousin; and concluded as he had begun, by asking her advice on a subject on which his own determination had been long fixed unalterably.

This letter reached Lady Harriet in safety; and before many days elapsed he received an answer from her, containing only these words: "*Nous nous reverrons.*"

To decide on the line of conduct most ad-

visable to pursue with Miss Fielding, required more circumspection. But perhaps the very difficulties of his enterprise only rendered him more ardent in its pursuit, and, with such a character as his, proportionably more certain of success. He had already informed himself that Julia was staying at her uncle's; that Lady Harriet was not expected in town for a week or ten days; and consequently, that till her arrival she had no female companion, and might therefore probably be found alone. But not even that temptation urged him beyond the straightened line of caution and discretion. He called at Lord Alton's door the morning after his introduction to his Lordship, and magnanimously left his three cards without even asking admission, a propriety which was not unmarked by the Earl, to whom the nicest shades of etiquette were easily discernible.

At Lord Ellesmere's, Fitzosborne presented himself with infinitely less embarrassment: the good old man received him with all the kindness and warmth of welcome due to one who

was not only his son's friend, but likewise was so free from all the follies and vices of the age. He told him that he had built a new cottage for the miller, at the precise spot recommended by Lionel; though, unfortunately, both the miller and the cottage had totally escaped Fitzosborne's recollection: he expressed his regret that the ladies were all out shopping, as he knew they would have had so much pleasure in seeing him; and finally, when Lionel was about to take his leave, he proposed accompanying him as far as Bond Street, as he had some business to transact at Storr and Mortimer's.

They had not walked up half the street when they perceived Lady Ellesmere's carriage standing at the door of the emporium of French bronzes; and just as they reached it, Lady Weldon's barouche drove up, and the two gentlemen were in time to accompany them into the shop, where Fitzosborne's quick glance almost intuitively perceived Julia Fielding with Lady Ellesmere and her daughters.

Julia coloured as she returned Lionel's bow,

with a consciousness which *she* was annoyed, and *he* was gratified at her betraying; but before the momentary confusion could be noticed by any other person, Mr. Russel joined them, and presented his companion, Lord Oporto, to Lady Ellesmere's party.

A fashionable shop in London is supereminently a good morning lounge; and in a few minutes the conversation became as animated, and as general, as if in a drawing-room, or even the porch of a favourite chapel-of-ease had been the scene of the rencontre.

"I did not see you in the Park yesterday, Lady Ellesmere," drawled out Lady Weldon, as she laid down a little *cassolette*, out of which she had spilt all the *eau à brûler*, as she was alternately gazing at Lord Oporto and trying to catch Fitzosborne's eye.

"No: we never go out of a Sunday, except to church," answered the Countess.

"La! they might just as well have staid in the country," observed Anna Weldon, as she gave her sister a sharp *nudge* with her elbow,

as Miss Betsy Fitzosborne usually designated such little annotations.

"If your Ladyship does not patronise Hyde Park on a Sunday, I hope you have not forsworn it on other days?" inquired Mr. Russel.

Meanwhile Fitzosborne had quietly contrived to pass up to the spot where Julia was standing, a little behind the rest of the party, admiring a beautiful vase for wafers. "Is not this beautiful?" said Lionel, taking up the bronze she was looking at. It so happened that this was the first time he had articulated one sentence to Julia since they had parted at the rectory, and he was half angry at himself for the uncontrollable emotion which was perceptible almost in his voice; but yet that voice was as mellifluent, as insinuating as ever.

Julia, scarcely knowing what she said, replied—"that she preferred another vase, that was of a different shape."

"Would to God, Miss Fielding, I had always judged as erroneously of your preferences,"

rejoined Fitzosborne, with intelligible emphasis.

Julia blushed still deeper for one passing moment, and the next, her colour waned. But drawing her beautiful figure into an attitude of dignity, she turned her dark eyes full on those of Lionel, as if unshrinking from his covert meaning, and in a low, but distinct voice, replied—" I am scarcely conscious, Mr. Fitzosborne, of having any preferences."

A quick, and almost hectic colour for an instant gleamed over Lionel's sallow cheek, and flushed his polished brow; for who could gaze unmoved on the majestic beauty of her he had so vainly sought to humble? but though the feeling was vivid, its effect was transient. It was evident that Julia had not misconstrued his allusion; and even her ingenuousness might be turned to his advantage.

" Alas! Miss Fielding, if I thought—if I could think you mean what you say—but I know your choice is fixed; and if my exertions —my influence, can promote your happiness,

even to the destruction of my own, time may come when at least I shall deserve the title of a friend."

Fitzosborne's looks—his voice—always implied tenfold what his words expressed. Julia's changing countenance, as breathless she almost leaned on the counter for support, convinced him he was not misunderstood; and as if to conceal his own emotion, but in reality to give her an opportunity of conquering hers, he walked abruptly to the other side of the shop.

All this had passed whilst Lord and Lady Ellesmere had been discussing with Lady Weldon the delights of Hyde Park. The two Misses Weldon had, meantime, occupied the attention of both the Ladies Calvert, who were standing in front of Julia, of whose arrival they were not yet apprised. But now their surprise, and somewhat boisterous recognition of her, afforded an opportune relief to her embarrassment.

"I wish, Russel, you would present me too

to Miss Fielding," said Lord Oporto, scarcely under his breath. I assure you it gives me quite as much pleasure to see her, as it does to see those young ladies."

The introduction was soon effected, and his Lordship continued his scrutiny of Julia *tout à son aise.*

"Are you to be at the Duchess of Chester's on the 20th?" asked his Lordship, addressing himself to Julia, whilst one arm, and the chief weight of his body leant on the counter, and with the other hand he knocked his little switch against his well-polished boot.

"I am not quite sure; but I rather think we shall go."

"Go!" screamed Anna Weldon—"why you are not invited already to a Duchess's surely?"

"Her cards only came this morning," mildly replied Julia. Meantime, Lord Oporto very deliberately turned more than half round, and transferred his stare from Julia to the unblushing Anna Weldon.

"Well, now, you do surprise me! Why, sister, our *dear* Julia has got an *invité* already—and to the Duchess of Somebody's too. Do tell me, Julia, how did you manage it?"

"No: but tell me, do you think you could get us asked? I am sure mamma would go and call upon her directly," said the calculating Miss Weldon. At that moment Lady Weldon walked towards them, attracted by her daughter's vociferation.

"You quite forget, my dear Anna, my delicate health. Who is this new person you both want me to visit? I really have so many invitations."

"Well, I declare, then, that is too bad!" rejoined the *indomptable* Anna, "when you know, mamma, we have been in town near a month, and have been out but to one party, and that was to a stupid Sunday music, at that paralytic old Bishop's."

"Are *you* going to the Duchess's?" whispered Mr. Russel to Lady Louisa, whilst this

spirited dialogue was going on with the Weldons.

"I am afraid not: she called on mamma, and we have not yet returned her visit; so I don't think she will ask us; and if she did, I am not sure that mamma would go, as she is not acquainted with her Grace."

"I am sure you would all like her very much—don't you think so, Fitzosborne?" added Mr. Russel, as the latter again approached them.

"She is pleasant enough when she does not bore us with those confounded long stories," observed Lord Oporto, with his usual yawn.

"Who is that man?" inquired Miss Weldon of Lady Matilda; "he must be somebody of consequence, or he would never speak that way of a Duchess."

Mr. Russel was now beside Lady Ellesmere, duly informing her of the very cordial manner in which the Duchess of Chester always spoke of Lord Calvert, whom, he added, "he had the

pleasure of meeting at Hauteville when the Duchess was there last Christmas."

"Dear me! I had no idea the Duchess of Chester was a friend of my son's; that accounts for her coming to call upon me. I am sure I am very much flattered by the honour of her acquaintance;" and the Countess, saying this, hurried off her two daughters and Julia to return the Duchess's visit, as she "had only just heard she was one of Calvert's intimate friends."

Neither Lord Oporto, Fitzosborne, nor Mr. Russel returned into the shop after they had once taken leave of Lady Ellesmere and her three fair companions; and as the old Earl had long before made his escape, Lady Weldon and her daughters had no excuse for loitering there any longer.

"Where shall we drive to now?" said her Ladyship, in a melancholy tone, somewhat indicative of *ennui*.

"I am *sure* we must have some visits to return," said Miss Weldon, with an emphasis that showed she was *sure* they had not.

"Oh no! we did them all the day before yesterday," replied Anna, with unrepressed vexation.

"Don't keep me waiting so, girls. I am tired to death, and I want to see Lady Tralee. I dare say she is a friend of the Duchess's;" and with renovated hope the three disconsolate ladies renewed their daily toil, commencing with a visit to Portman Square. But as Lady Tralee was not at home, and as even Lady Weldon's ignorant effrontery did not admit of her writing to Lady Tralee on the subject of the Duchess's party, but one expedient suggested itself to her imagination; and that was, to invite both the Ellesmere and Tralee families to dinner on the very day named for her Grace's assembly, in the faint hope that either one or other of the ladies would take compassion, at least on her daughters, and volunteer taking them to her Grace's house on their own responsibility: so little was Lady Weldon aware of the difference between a London acquaintance, and the familiarity of country friendships, which have even within these fifty

years been known to be carried to the extent of whole household emigrations, at the expense of side-tables, pinioned elbows, and returning at night six inside passengers in a small post-chaise.

CHAPTER XI.

A DUCHESS AT HOME.

Homewarde pricked King Arthure,
And a wearye man was hee;
And soone hee mette Queene Gunevar
That bride so brighte of blee.
PERCY'S RELIQUES.

NOTHING is so easy as to give a good dinner in London, where every thing is at every body's command except good company. And even the latter desideratum Lady Weldon flattered herself she had obtained, when both Lord Ellesmere's family and Lord Tralee's accepted her invitation to dinner on the appointed day; for as to their *dear* Julia Fielding having sent an

excuse in consequence of the expected arrival of Lady Harriet Moreton, the ladies consoled themselves for her absence with infinitely more facility than they would have done, had it at all entered into their calculation that her star was already lord of the ascendant in the highest houses.

Nothing could surpass the savoury perfume which pervaded the whole mansion, nay half the side of Lower Grosvenor Street, on that momentous occasion; and indeed Lady Weldon's persevering exertions were so far rewarded, that she had the satisfaction of seeing more dishes and candles on her table than many dinners could boast. But, on the other hand, half her company disappointed her. Lady Tralee never brought more than one daughter out with her to a dinner-party. That was a hint which Anna Weldon made a memorandum to forget. The old Bishop was obliged to dine early to go to the House of Lords, and his wife did not know either Lady Tralee or Lady Ellesmere, and could only talk to the Weldons about her poor

dear sister Masham. And lastly, although Lady Weldon—for Sir James had no vote—had asked nearly every beau of her acquaintance, none came except the obliging Major Crosbie, who went away nearly as soon as the ladies left the dining-parlour.

However, if Lady Weldon's feast had been unprovided with guests, her drawing-room was well supplied; for she had gone through her whole visiting list, and had the merit of assembling together as incongruous a crowd as if her Ladyship's summons had been the last trump. Still however her dinner guests pertinaciously kept aloof from the evening interlopers, except the Bishop's Lady, who happily for herself recognised amongst them several old friends.

Lady Ellesmere's manners were certainly repulsive to strangers in general, from that strange mixture of pride and modesty which is so often the compound origin of a haughtiness, that is allowed to be almost a national rather than an individual characteristic. Lady Tralee's

manners were scarcely less reserved, though from a different motive, as her silence usually proceeded from a fear of committing herself. And thus whilst Lord Tralee was profiting by Sir James Weldon's old sherry down stairs, and every moment making fresh inroads into the good opinion of Lord Ellesmere, to whom he particularly devoted himself, the two Ladies were reciprocally gaining on each other's esteem, as it was difficult to say which was most polite, most haughty, or most taciturn.

Lady Matilda, from a prepossession against the Tralee family for which she could scarcely account, devoted herself almost as exclusively to Miss Weldon, as Lady Weldon did to her increasing crowd of visitors, whilst Anna Weldon divided her attention pretty equally between Lady Louisa and Miss Fitzosborne: but when the latter ascertained that both the Ladies Calvert, with their antiquated mamma, were going to one of the Duchess of Chester's most select parties, to which none of the Tralee ladies had been invited, her dismay only equalled her

tardy regret at not having sooner cultivated their Ladyships' valuable acquaintance; whilst Lady Tralee, horrified at the idea of being seen to take tea and dinner at the same house, no sooner saw Lord Tralee making a bow at the far end of the drawing-room, than she hurried away to go—as she said—to another party, but in reality to bed.

Whilst London had thus by degrees drawn into one focus so large a proportion of all that was most brilliant, whether of rank or fashion or talent, Lord Calvert, one of its brightest luminaries, had voluntarily expatriated himself, and had passed some dreary weeks at Paris without having exactly ascertained to his own satisfaction why he went abroad, or what detained him there? Parliament had met, and from day to day he repeated both to himself and others that he *must* go back to London to take his seat. But his journey was not commenced, nor did he choose to fathom his own feelings so far as to ascertain the cause of this delay. Had he probed his own heart, perhaps

the mystery would have been in some degree solved by those words that still rang in his ear, that Julia Fielding would soon appear in London as Fitzosborne's bride. Perhaps too, had he fully developed his own plans, he would have traced in them a proud determination to withdraw himself from all competition with Lionel; to leave to Miss Fielding unbiassed liberty of choice; and to regulate his future actions solely by hers. Had he thus investigated his own thoughts, he would possibly, ere it was too late, have seen the folly, not to say cruelty, of abandoning Julia to the machinations of his rival without giving her the talisman of at least believing in his regard. In short, his scrupulous delicacy in leaving Julia free, absolutely deprived her of the liberty of choice. But Lord Calvert was his own master—his was the deed, and his the risk—for even Fitzosborne himself would scarcely have ventured to advise a line of conduct so conducive to his own success.

Paris however began to pall upon his taste. He was one morning lounging in the Ambassa-

dor's drawing-room, till he was tired of looking at the King's picture, the yellow silk walls, and the or-moulu candlesticks. The Ambassadress had not come down stairs from her beautiful morning room; and he had walked up and down the glass passages that are called conservatories, till he was reduced to counting the blue and white stripes of the calico that is stretched behind the plants; at length his reverie was interrupted by the entrance of her Excellency radiant in smiles and diplomatic courtesy; when, scarcely less to his own astonishment than hers, he asked her commands to London, as he was to set off next morning. The intention was sudden, but, thus announced, became irrevocable. And within as few hours as could reasonably be calculated upon, a travelling chariot all bespattered with mud, and four horses equally invisible from dirt, deposited Lord Calvert and Monsieur Laroche at Lord Ellesmere's house in St. James's Square, much about the same moment that Sir James Weldon escorted the stately Countess to the seat next the fire in the

Baronet's dining-parlour in Lower Grosvenor Street.

Though Lord Calvert was disappointed in not finding his family at home, he was not unprovided with an agreeable substitute. As his carriage had accidentally been stopped for an instant turning out of Piccadilly, he had been recognised by Lord Hauteville and Mr. Danvers, who were just crossing St. James's Street. "Will you eat your mutton-chop with us, if Lord Ellesmere is not at home?" was the salutation he received *en passant*; and on his arrival at Lord Hauteville's he was just in time to join their family party, as they were passing into the dining-room to one of Mr. Sievrac's *chefs-d'œuvres en fait de petits couverts.*

As a matter of course, Lady Hauteville was prepared to go to the Duchess of Chester's; and as a matter of course, Lord Calvert agreed to accompany them. Lady Susan Danvers was not well, and preferred playing *écarté* at home with the Viscount. But Lady Charlotte Hargrove occupied the fourth seat in Lady Haute-

ville's carriage with Lord Calvert and Mr. Danvers — not a little pleased at commencing her London campaign under such favourable auspices.

It is impossible to describe the delight with which, as Lady Ellesmere entered the cloak-room at the Duchess of Chester's, she descried her beloved son, whom she believed to be then many miles distant; and as to Lady Matilda and Louisa, their joy could scarcely be expressed: as Lady Hauteville afterwards observed, it was as refreshing to the heart to witness such genuine feelings in the sophisticated atmosphere of London, as it was to the eye to gaze on the unartificial beauty of their different countenances. In one moment, Lady Tralee's spiteful predictions were falsified; and, so far from Lady Ellesmere and her daughters being excluded from Lady Hauteville's set, they were instantaneously admitted into her list of intimates.

Lady Hauteville good-humouredly offered her arm to Lady Ellesmere, and proposed presenting her to the Duchess. Such an introduc-

tion, and to such a house, was quite sufficient to set the seal of popularity on the Ladies Calvert for the rest of their lives—and in fact more than counterbalanced the angular *contour* of the respectable Countess, which formerly Lionel had pronounced to be equally indicative of rank, and irreconcilable with fashion. How capricious is that goddess! How frequently, as in the present instance, does she lavish her smiles on those who scarcely prize them, and deny them to those patient votaries, who, like the Weldons or Tralees, live but in the hope of finally obtaining them!

The Duchess of Chester's house has so often been described in the Morning Post, that any detail here would be quite superfluous. The flower-pots on each step of the staircase, and the *jardinieres* filled with roses in March, were not more characteristic of her Grace than the other accompaniments of this party. It was proclaimed on her cards as "*une petite réunion*," and, in conformity to this announcement, only about a hundred exclusives were selected out

of her visiting list, "*pour y assister.*" The arrangement of her rooms was in character of this professed small party, as none of the dozen couches were removed out of their organized irregularity, and every different table displayed some chosen specimens of her Ladyship's taste in the collection of foreign rarities.

Just as the Countess and Lady Hauteville reached the anti-room, they found the doors from it into the adjoining drawing-room were thronged with beaux, who had all stepped back to make room for the exhibition of the Rainer family, who were singing their *Ranz des Vaches* to one of the politest audiences that the most refined society in London could produce.

"What strange anomalies we see every day!" observed Lady Hauteville. "Swiss mountaineers are brought into company to call their cows for the amusement of lords and ladies; and Dutch women sell brooms in Bond Street, whilst half our own peasant-girls are starving!" Lady Hauteville's observations were here curtailed, for the song was finished, and the

Duchess came up to greet her new guests, and to congratulate herself, even more than Lady Ellesmere, on Lord Calvert's arrival.

They now entered the drawing-room, which was only one of a long suite, which seemed to open in every direction, so well were the doors and looking-glasses arranged. Lady Ellesmere very quietly took her seat on a vacant couch with Lady Matilda and Lady Louisa seated beside her, with due attention to seniority. Lady Hauteville was gone with the Duchess and Lady Charlotte to the other side of the room. Lord Calvert was soon monopolized by friends, both male and female; and Lord Ellesmere and Mr. Danvers remained stationary at the door: thus the Countess and her daughters were left in some degree isolated, as none of their own party were near them.

Lord Byron has admirably described being alone in a crowded street, exclaiming—"This—this is solitude!" But there is one degree, or kind of solitude, which is, if possible, more painful—it is, to feel without an acquaintance in a room filled with those who are all appa-

rently intimate with each other, and each of whom would, perhaps, be a desirable acquaintance to yourself—to make one of a society, which is so contracted that you feel, or fancy yourself within every body's ken, and yet so large that you are ashamed of owning no friend within its ample bounds—to be excluded from all the different topics of conversation you hear buzzed around you; and to own no community of thought or deed with those who all seem happier than you are conscious of being. If this is not "worse than solitude," let the contradiction be affirmed by any young lady who has not been long enough *out* to forget her *début* in society.

Lady Ellesmere was still seated, somewhat pompously, and very perpendicularly, on the dark-velvet sofa, which happened to be placed more ostentatiously crooked than any other seat of the room. Lady Matilda was exceedingly annoyed; and therefore looked, if possible, more dignified and handsomer than ever: but still she *was* annoyed at hearing, as she could not help being, the various comments

and degrees of praise lavished in different terms on her own beauty, and that of her sister; but all ending in some paraphrase of the sentence, "Who are they?" And Lady Louisa, delighted at finding herself positively at a party in London, gaily threw her animated glances around her; not only in admiration of all the inanimate curiosities that met her view, but also, perchance, in search of some living object, which, at least in the shape of an acquaintance, was no where visible.

At last, the distant sounds of a harp attracted their attention; and as several of the company moved off in separate parties towards the room from whence they seemed to come, Lady Ellesmere rose, with her usual stateliness, and, followed by the Ladies Calvert, proceeded in the same direction.

The point of attraction was the Duchess's *boudoir;* which she herself boasted was the perfection of good taste. But no person was at leisure to admire either the design or execution of the furniture, as every eye was fixed on

a beautiful foreign lady, splendidly dressed, who was tuning a harp, in preface to complying with the requests of a legion of gentlemen, who had been pressing her to sing. Lord Calvert seemed the most favoured of her attendants, as she submitted the choice of her exhibition to him: and Lady Ellesmere had only time to learn that the performer was the Countess Montalvina, when the air commenced; and every charm of science and of taste were called forth in execution of Lord Calvert's favourite *cavatina*.

The compliments were of course endless. In consideration of her being a foreigner, no praise was considered exaggerated. The Duchess was eloquent in her thanks and her admiration; and then turned away to receive them in turn from the rest of the company, leaving Lord Calvert to continue the strain, which he was doubly called upon to repeat; as, besides his having really admired the performance, the fair singer frequently asserted that she had only sung in compliment to him.

At last, a commotion was perceptible near the door: the sounds of "lovely! beautiful! enchanting!" were heard from that quarter; and the next moment the crowd gave way to the Duchess, who appeared, dragging, rather than leading in two ladies, who had just entered, escorted by Fitzosborne and Mr. Russel, and whom the Duchess now brought up to present to the Countess Montalvina, with an earnest request that she would do her the favour to repeat, once more, Lord Calvert's favourite air, as both Lady Harriet Moreton and Miss Fielding were passionately fond of music.

If the world had crumbled at Lord Calvert's feet, he would scarcely have been more astounded than when Julia Fielding thus broke upon his view in a blaze of beauty, exceeding any thing even his imagination could have pictured. Lady Harriet Moreton, partly to please her father, and partly to do credit to her own taste, had exerted herself to the utmost in the embellishment of Julia on this her first night of assuming the somewhat irksome task of *cha-*

peron: for finding that the condition on which she was permitted once more to establish herself in her father's house, was that of being *chaperon* to her lovely cousin, and that too under the immediate eye of Lord Alton, she saw no alternative remained to her choice; and as she could not hope in any way to shroud or eclipse Miss Fielding's beauty, the only game remaining to her was to attribute, at least as far as possible, the merit of its exhibition to herself.

But all this was unknown to Lord Calvert: at first, he fancied himself in a dream; and at last, only roused himself to the certainty that Julia stood before him the acknowledged and unrivalled beauty of a scene, which was in itself a galaxy of loveliness. In an instant—even a lover's instant—he perceived not only that her style, her dress, her air, was changed; but that Lionel Fitzosborne was in her suite. Yet all this passed while he returned Lady Harriet's cordial nod; and made to Julia a bow between reverence and pique, only commen-

surate with the haughty coldness with which she returned his distant salutation.

"*Zitto! zitto!*" cried the Duchess, as she put her finger to her mouth, and, looking round the crowd, stopped at once the murmurs of curiosity and admiration, which Julia's entrance had excited; then slipping into a corner, she gave the example of attention to La Contessa Montalvina.

The centre of the room was left vacant; in it was placed the harp, on which the lovely Italian, conscious of her own powers, and by no means averse to their display, leaned in apparent embarrassment, waiting the effect of the Duchess's invocation to silence. Lord Calvert retained his old station at her side, whilst she alternately stopped to tune the instrument, and to speak to Lady Harriet; as in the first she exhibited her beautiful arm, and in the last made an equal display of her no less brilliant eyes and teeth: the rest of the company had retreated into a kind of semicircle, in front of which Julia stood unwillingly prominent, though sup-

ported both by Lionel and Mr. Russel, each of whom exerted themselves from time to time to relieve her embarrassment, by occasionally addressing her.

At last, the farce of tuning the harp was at an end; Lady Harriet resumed her station beside Julia, though still in the foreground: Fitzosborne and Mr. Russel crossed over, on tip-toe, to the other side of the circle. All was silence and attention. The Countess struck a few low chords; then turning her beautiful eyes to where Lord Calvert had also retreated, a few steps behind her, she exclaimed, "Deh! resta meco! temo che non posso più cantar;" and then at once broke out into that rich flow of mellowed harmony that peculiarly belongs to an Italian *cantatrice*.

But it was not the unequalled science she displayed, and still less was it the rapturous applause that succeeded, which most struck on Julia's ear. No:—it was the soft, confiding, almost suppliant voice, with which the siren had uttered her incantation to Lord Calvert,

which bound its spell around poor Julia's heart. "*Deh! resta meco*," thrilled in her bosom, but found no echo there: her womanly pride seemed to spread a shield of adamant around her, and, like the fabled charm, turned all within to stone.

Fitzosborne, whose darkling eye had never wandered from Julia's countenance, except one stray and solitary glance when hers directed him towards Lord Calvert, even Fitzosborne was astonished at her calmness. "Has she indeed no preference?" thought he; and anxious again to approach her, he counted the moments of La Contessa's singing, though at its conclusion none seemed more enraptured than he appeared.

The moment the music ceased, every body was anxious to emancipate themselves from the thraldom even of pleasure. The circle instantly closed over the little vacant space; some hurrying to recognise friends in the crowd; others hastening to offer their compliments to the Contessa, which she seemed waiting to receive. Amongst the latter, was Lady Harriet Moreton;

and stepping again forward, she joined the group which immediately surrounded the harp: but her attention was not solely devoted to the fair Italian.—" Why, Mr. Jessop, I did not see you before.—How do, Lord Oporto? I saw the Marchioness and Miss Flinn in the other room. Oh! there is that eternal Duchess of Durham; I wonder she is not tired of going about every where.—Pray, Lord Calvert, help me to escape from her: there, stand so, and she will never see me; and now tell me what have you been doing ever since I saw you—when did you come from Paris?"

Lord Calvert willingly acceded to any place that relieved him from the trouble of further acting *cavaliere servente* to the Countess Montalvina. The move also brought him nearer to Julia; but he did not acknowledge to himself even that he wished to approach her, for at that moment she was talking with great animation to Fitzosborne on the perfection of La Contessa's singing.

Lord Shawe having come up to make his bow to Lady Harriet, Lord Calvert was left

for a moment directly facing Miss Fielding and her companion; and Lionel, with unmoved countenance and unshrinking brow, reached forward his hand to welcome Lord Calvert, adding, as he seemed to shake his with cordiality, "I am afraid, Calvert, you did not get a letter I wrote to you last Monday?"

"No! was it of any consequence?"

"Not as you are arrived at last; it merely contained some information that I thought might influence you to return."

The word *influence* struck upon Julia's mind. Lionel spoke always so emphatically, that his words appeared to convey a stronger meaning than those of any other person. "Good God!" thought Julia, "can it be possible that he would endeavour to influence him to return!"

She scarcely dared to investigate her thoughts; but her irritated feelings seemed to rise with every passing moment. Lord Calvert was still standing close beside her: it was impossible to avoid speaking, had either wished to do so; and yet it was difficult to say which felt the task

most irksome: Lord Calvert was, however, the first to break the painful silence.

"Was not that last song beautiful, Miss Fielding?" As Julia gave her free assent to this observation, her proud heart swelled as she thought Lord Calvert might have spared her rival's praise. He, meanwhile, thought only of the last time he had ever heard Julia herself sing that same air: it was on the very morning when Lionel Fitzosborne had made his first visit to the rectory.

"I do not think the Countess sung as well as usual to-night," observed Lionel, with the utmost apparent ingenuousness. "Do you remember, Calvert, her singing on the banks of the Arno, the night we returned from Val Ombrosa?"

Julia had not an opportunity of hearing Lord Calvert's reply, for just then Lord Oporto joined them, with the Marchioness leaning on his arm, whom he introduced to her with the utmost pomposity; whilst Lady Coleraine, with infinite good-nature, took Julia by the hand:

"My dear Miss Fielding," said her Ladyship, "I am come positively to ask a favour of you; will you do me the kindness to accompany Lady Harriet to my ball to-morrow night? I really did not know that either you or Lady Harriet were come to town, or I should have made this request in a more proper form."

Julia, of course, expressed her thanks; and of course referred the answer to her cousin: but Lady Coleraine interrupted her. "Oh! positively you must come—*c'est une affaire faite;* everybody says my ball will be quite a *manquée* without you—*n'est-ce pas, Milord?*" continued she, turning to Lord Calvert.

"I am sure *I* think so," replied he, with a momentary return of that vivacious gallantry with which, in former times, he had always involuntarily addressed Julia: but those times were passed.

"How impertinent!" thought Julia, as she returned his compliment with a contemptuous smile. But her reflections were interrupted by a white glove tapping her on her shoulder; and

turning round, she saw Lady Louisa, who instantly exclaimed—" At last, dear Julia, I have reached you: I heard you spoken of half-an-hour ago, but I should never have got up to you, if it had not been for Mr. Russel."

" Who is that very pretty girl?" whispered Lady Coleraine to Lord Calvert; and upon hearing it was his youngest sister, she desired him to present her: and then taking his arm most unceremoniously, Lord Oporto being engaged with Julia, she told him to take her to Lady Ellesmere and his other sister, as she declared she must be acquainted with them, as the old Earl " had been a flirt of hers a hundred years ago." As they passed Lady Harriet, however, she stopped for a moment to inquire for Lord Alton.

" I expect my father every instant," replied her Ladyship. " He intended coming with us, but was unfortunately prevented by a gentleman calling upon him on particular business; he, however, promised to follow us."

" Well, do tell him, if he does not come be-

fore I go, that he must either call on me some morning, or positively I will storm his castle. That canal must be done, and nobody can get the bill through the House but Lord Alton. And *à propos*, Lord Calvert, you must help me about it in the House of Commons; it is of the utmost consequence to the nation at large, and to me in particular: if you will call on me any day before three, I will show you the prospectus.—How d'ye do, Miss Mortimer? Lord Shawe was inquiring after you in the other room. There's Lady Charlotte Hargrove: now I vow, Calvert, she would be an excellent match for you. You know she says she is dying to be married, and she and Lady Susan are co-heiresses. Let me introduce you to her. Oh! by-the-bye, I forget; you know her already, with the Hautevilles."

The Marchioness might have continued her harangue uninterruptedly much longer; for although Lord Calvert's bodily exertions were not wanting in making way through the crowd, his mind was totally preoccupied in endeavouring to explain the cause of that coldness

and reserve in Julia's manner, which he had not failed to remark. Was it caprice? was it vanity? was it merely indifference? or was it that she was totally engrossed by the attention paid to her by Fitzosborne? He had turned from her in disgust, when he had been taught to think that she sought his regard; and now, with all the waywardness of human folly, he resented even the appearance of an indifference, which was a kinder sentiment than his own capricious conduct seemed to merit.

At length they reached the part of the room where Lady Ellesmere was seated, talking to Mr. Danvers; whilst Lady Matilda and Lord Ellesmere were carrying on an apparently interesting conversation with Lord Alton. "I declare there he is," observed Lady Coleraine, "talking to your father, I dare say, about this excise business. I am told there has been a great fraud on the revenue discovered; something that will implicate the Lord knows who."

Little was her Ladyship aware that this interesting conversation, in which both noblemen seemed to take equal pleasure, related solely to

landscape-gardening, on which subject Lady Matilda was not unfrequently appealed to by both. It was so unlikely a theme for a London drawing-room, that Lady Coleraine may be forgiven for not having anticipated it. She, however, scrupled not to interrupt it by her invitations to the Ellesmeres, and was just beginning, what she termed, an electioneering attack upon Lord Alton, when it was curtailed by the approach of Lady Harriet Moreton, escorted by the young Duke of Durham, and Julia leaning on Fitzosborne.

Lady Harriet slightly but kindly saluted Lady Ellesmere and her daughter; for her Ladyship had made a secret vow never to be intimate with such pompous personages. But to her father she turned with one of her sweetest smiles, saying—"Are you coming with us to Mrs. Winter's ball, papa?"

"I quite forgot it, I declare, Harriet; but of course I will attend you, and my pretty niece:" then rising, with an alacrity more congenial to his appearance than to his age, he

took leave of the Ellesmere party, leaving Lord Calvert still entangled with the loquacious Marchioness.

Julia's spirits were depressed, and her feelings irritated, as she drove from that scene in which she had innocently anticipated gaiety and pleasure. She had scarcely seen either Lady Ellesmere or her daughters during the whole evening; and of her meeting with Lord Calvert, she scarcely dared to think. But, in a short time, her attention was diverted to a new scene. Mrs. Winter's ball was crowded: and if amongst the throng Julia recognised scarcely any of her acquaintances, it was at least a relief to her to be spared the unhappiness of witnessing the triumph of one, to whom she supposed all her misery was to be attributed.

Lady Harriet, however, scarcely did more than pass through the rooms, which she considered was an ample return for many substantial kindnesses, which Mrs. Winter had shown to her and Sir Henry, when they had

formerly been quartered in her neighbourhood. Impatient to leave a house where so few of her own set were to be found, she even dragged Julia some yards on the muddy pavement, in preference to waiting for her carriage to reach the door; and professing anxious solicitude about her health, and equal anxiety to accommodate herself to Lord Alton's usual hours, she returned home, to regret the stupid evening, which had only admitted of two engagements.

CHAPTER XII.

SCANDAL.

Now loitering o'er her tea and cream,
She enters on her usual theme.

SWIFT.

IT would be difficult to find any two characters more strongly contrasted than those of Lord Alton and Lord Tralee. The latter seemed to make an appearance of business the chief object of his life; whilst the former, having much of the affairs of the nation actually on his mind, so contrived to arrange and methodise his time, as to appear almost always at leisure.

It was an unusual circumstance that occasioned the postponement of his attendance at the Duchess of Chester's party, even for one hour: and the next morning, when he joined his daughter's breakfast-table, few people would have supposed that the same mysterious business had already occupied him for some hours. A slight trace of thoughtfulness only marked his brow on his first appearance, but it soon wore away; and the politeness, urbanity, nay even vivacity of his manner, was as conspicuous in his intercourse with his daughter and his niece, as if a world of adulators had been present to reflect his smiles.

Julia was already waiting in the breakfast-room, and she and her uncle had a pleasant *tête-à-tête* of some minutes before Lady Harriet made her entrance. Every day's association with the uncle and niece seemed to increase their affection towards each other: Julia was surprised that she should feel so intimate and unrestrained with one whose character was so reverenced by the world in general; and he,

equally delighted by her ingenuousness and cultivated talents, mentally vowed to do every thing in his power to promote the happiness of such a lovely girl; in other words, to facilitate her union with Fitzosborne, which he was now more than ever convinced was the secret object of her wishes.

When Lady Harriet entered the room, she apologised for her delay, by alleging in its excuse, that she had just received a long letter from Sir Henry, which she had waited to peruse.

"Is he still at Broomhill barracks?" inquired Lord Alton in a tone of indifference.

"Yes; but he is going for a short time to his father's, and he has desired me to ask if you have any objection to his shooting over your manors in Durham?"

"You may tell Sir Henry, Harriet, that I have kept up my game quite as much this year as I ever did before; but if he has thought it desirable to repeat his annual request, it must of course be of some importance to him: he

may shoot over the manor of Greensward—the others are inviolable."

Julia was surprised that Lord Alton could grant a favour so coldly, or refuse it so politely, for she scarcely knew in which sense to consider his reply. Lady Harriet was perfectly indifferent as to the result; perhaps even if her real thoughts had been discovered, she had only given Sir Henry's message to Lord Alton, in the hope of annoying her father by the request, and her husband by its denial. But if such were her thoughts, they were not betrayed by her manner. Her seat happened to be opposite to a magnificent mirror, and whilst her father was speaking she had been engaged in arranging a very becoming French cap, in which that morning she looked particularly handsome.

"What are on our list for to-night, Julia?" continued she yawning. "I really am so lately come to this Paradise of dainty devices—this dear distracting London, that I am scarcely yet *en train*. Oh! I remember, it is Lady Coleraine's ball—it will be tolerably good."

"Are you sure, my love, that it will not tire you to go out every night?" said theEarl to Julia, cordially taking her hand.

"Indeed, my dear uncle, it would give me the greatest pleasure to stay at home, if Lady Harriet likes to do so."

"My dear Miss Fielding, you should have thought of all that last night, when Lady Coleraine asked you so very kindly. Ladies of her rank and fashion are not accustomed to be treated cavalierly."

The servant just then announced that Mr. Russel wished to see Lord Alton in his study, and the breakfast party broke up.

"Now, my dear little cousin," observed Lady Harriet as soon as they were again alone, "as you are not used to London, nor I to the delight of acting Duenna; let us come to a clear understanding as to our future plans and arrangements."

"If you mean our engagements, Lady Harriet, allow me to throw myself entirely on your hands; I have no wish either as to

going out or staying at home, except as is agreeable to you."

"Very indifferently good-natured indeed, my dear *contadina in corte*," replied her Ladyship laughing; "but, if you please, we must descend a little into particulars: in the first place, let us compare visiting lists."

"I have no friends in town but those who are also your Ladyship's acquaintances," answered Julia drily.

"Yes, exactly; but your *friends* may be only my *acquaintances*, and *vice versa:* there is the difficulty. We must first settle who we can admit in a morning; for my poor dear father, who is sometimes a little antiquated in his notions, and always desperately positive, has insisted, the Lord knows why, on you and I going into partnership in every thing: so to begin:—There are those fat Misses Weldon and their vulgar mamma, with her eternal *vinaigrettes* and nervous head-aches, the personification of Plenty, and no *waist;* we can never

be at home to them you know: that would be quite impossible."

"I think I recollect meeting them at your house in the country;" said Julia, and she thought with a sigh of the happy day she had spent at Broomhill Barracks, almost the last of that sunny track which had till lately marked the horizon of her memory with a golden beam.

"In the country—yes: *cela va sans dire;* but in town they are quite impracticable: we will, however, go to them once during the season, in order not to seem forgetful of their civilities. Then there is Lady Ellesmere and her daughters, though they are, to be sure, of much higher rank than the Weldons——"

"Lady Ellesmere has been a mother to me, and her daughters are ——"

"Not sisters, I hope, Julia. Come, don't blush, and look so angry, but hear me quietly. I was going to say, that as they are such *very* dear friends of yours, and withall miraculous

favourites of my father's, I propose they should always be admitted; and see, I put a huge Y opposite their names in the porter's list."

"Thank you, dear Lady Harriet," exclaimed Julia, who had fancied she never could have liked Lady Harriet as much as she felt she did at that moment.

"But I was further going to add, that as they are more decidedly your friends than mine, I dare say it will be pleasanter both to you and them, that I should not always mount guard when they come; so whenever you like to see them, or indeed any other person, you can receive them in the library. I should indeed propose your taking that for *your* morning room, only papa is so odd, and I know he expects that we shall receive our visitors together, just as if we were in harness like coach-horses. Then who else do you know in town?—Lady Hauteville?"

"No."

"Well, you will know her with me; she is *tant soit peu* puritanical; but her parties are

excellent. Lady Susan Danvers, her daughter-in-law, is a blue devil cut in white marble; but then she is always making either babies or baby-linen; so she seldom goes out. Her sister, Lady Charlotte, is just like most other girls, as impudent as she dare, and as witty as she can. Next comes Lady Tralee, a mere non-entity, doing nothing right for fear of doing any thing wrong: but she rides into society on the reputation of her son; and that brings us to Mr. Fitzosborne: of course, Miss Fielding, we are always at home to him."

"I do not wish to be so," hastily rejoined Julia.

"*Brava! brava!*" continued her Ladyship, ringing the bell. "What says the proverb? *Qui s'excuse s'accuse.* Here, John, take this list to the porter. Whenever Mr. Fitzosborne calls, and asks either for Miss Fielding or me, he is to be shown up. And now, Julia, having, I flatter myself, entered nobly on my new office of—what shall I call it?—lady-in-waiting—I shall bid you good bye till two: we will then

be at home for an hour, before we go out; and, in the mean time, I must write to the amiable Sir Henry, as otherwise he might take it into his wise head to come and look after me." So saying she moved gaily towards the door, where, stopping for an instant, she turned towards Julia: the gay smile of levity had passed away, and her beautiful brow showed a slight contraction, indicative of mental agony; but still her dark eye flashed fire as she added, in the smothered tone of ill-suppressed emotion—"Oh, Julia! Julia! take warning by me. If you are wise, you will never marry; for even contempt is no antidote to hate." With these words she shut the door, and the next moment Julia heard her carolling the *ranz des vaches* they had heard the night before.

Lady Harriet thus broke her own charm; for that air recalled such painful images to Julia's mind, that she stood leaning on the chimney-piece, totally abstracted from the present scene, till more minutes elapsed than she had counted; and she was at last roused from

her reverie by the servant announcing Mr. Fitzosborne, who at the same moment entered.

"Let Lady Harriet know Mr. Fitzosborne is here," said Julia, as the servant shut the door; and the next moment, recollecting herself, she prepared to follow him, on the pretext of being her own messenger.

"My visit is more to you than to her, Miss Fielding. Will you not allow me five minutes' conversation?" and as Lionel said this, he so placed himself as to impede, in some degree, her departure. Not well knowing how to extricate herself from this disagreeable predicament, and expecting every moment that Lady Harriet would return, she threw herself, somewhat impatiently, on a chair; whilst Lionel, leaning his arm on the chimney-piece, proceeded with an agitation he could scarcely overcome.

"I am afraid, Miss Fielding, my presence is disagreeable to you: but, believe me, it is only my anxiety for your happiness which makes me seek this explanation——"

"*My* happiness, Mr. Fitzosborne! I neither know to what you allude, nor am I aware of any right that you possess——"

"Yes, Julia—Miss Fielding, I do possess a right, the right which the most fervent—most unalterable attachment can bestow. But it is not of my own feelings I would speak—the words escaped me—it is of yours."

"Mr. Fitzosborne, you are taking a liberty which, so far from being sanctioned, is increased by your allusion. I have already——"

"Well, then, I must speak to Lord Calvert; if *you* will not hear me, I will tell Lord Calvert——"

"Lord Calvert!" exclaimed Julia, almost breathless with anxiety — "Lord Calvert! what reference—why should you—I don't understand you, Mr. Fitzosborne."

"And yet it is my wish that you *should* understand me fully—explicitly—;" and as he said this in the most harmonious tones of his insinuating voice, he took Julia's passive hand, that hung cold and motionless at her side. "I

said your happiness was dearer to me than my own—I believe—forgive me, Julia, for I only wish to prove myself your friend—I *believe* your happiness would be promoted, if the wishes of your family were fulfilled. What those are I need not name. Perhaps I may deceive myself; but my influence with Lord Calvert has, ere now, been proved. And if, Julia, I could once see you happy—if I could once feel that you would sometimes think of me—remember me with a feeling of—at least not that of hate ——"

At that moment, whilst Lionel still held Julia's death-like hand, the door opened to admit the Ladies Calvert. Lady Louisa had nearly outstripped her sister in her anxiety to embrace Julia, who now starting up, hastily withdrew the hand which she had been scarcely conscious of Lionel's retaining, and, with blushes that only made her agitation more conspicuous, received her friends in silence.

The servant, fortunately intent on his own duties, set forward chairs, and stirred the fire;

and, in the consequent bustle, created a welcome diversion to Julia's almost insupportable embarrassment. Lionel, meanwhile, walked to the window. It was not his intention to conceal from the Ladies Calvert his attachment to Julia; on the contrary, it was part of his design now to give it, in some degree, publicity, and at the same time to make it appear that it was sanctioned by her family. His being thus found *tête-à-tête* with Julia in Lord Alton's house, was a confirmation of both; and as he stood apparently gazing intently out of the window, he was in fact triumphing in the success of his deep-laid schemes, and anticipating, not without some reason, their ultimate, and not very distant completion.

In a few moments, Lady Harriet Moreton made her appearance. Her reception of the Ladies Calvert was courteous in the extreme; but as she was determined to take the first opportunity of throwing their visits on Julia, for whom indeed they were intended, she soon rose again from her seat, and withdrew

with Lionel once more to the recess of the window.

"You don't look well, dearest Julia," said Lady Louisa affectionately, taking her hand; "I hope you were not tired last night?"

"No; but I almost wish I had remained quiet at the rectory;" and as poor Julia said this, the tears dropped silently on Louisa's hand.

"You are a strange girl, Julia," said Lady Matilda, with a mixture of vivacity and coldness in her manner which was unlike her usual address. "When may I hope to see the riddle solved?"

Before Julia could reply, Lord Alton entered, much to the astonishment of Lady Harriet, who had never before seen him join ladies' society in a morning. As he passed up the room, he threw a rapid glance to where Lady Harriet and Mr. Fitzosborne were standing together; but his unexpected visit to the drawing-room was intended for the Ladies Calvert, and to them he addressed his first attention. After the first salutations were over, he told Lady Matilda

that he had just purposed calling on Lady Ellesmere with tickets for the Grosvenor gallery, which she had expressed a wish to see. "And, Mr. Fitzosborne," added the Earl with one of his kindest smiles, "will you be of our party? Julia, my love, you will be delighted with the paintings;—will she not, Mr. Fitzosborne?"

Quick as ever eagle's eye discerned its prey, did Lionel's glance rest on Julia's flushing cheek, as he accepted this more than flattering invitation, whilst again the smile of triumph played round his beautiful mouth. Lord Alton marked the countenances of each; but he quickly turned the conversation.

"Are you going to Lady Coleraine's to-night, Lady Matilda?" inquired his Lordship.

She replied, that Lady Ellesmere never allowed her or Lady Louisa to go out two nights following.

"There, Harriet," continued Lord Alton good-humouredly, "when will you follow Lady Ellesmere's prudent example? But what will her Ladyship say of *me*, when she hears that

in my old age these two wicked gypsies are leading me into all sorts of dissipation?"

"Nay, my Lord, you must not call yourself old; no person will believe you:" and after Lady Matilda said this, she blushed at her own audacity.

"Shall I have the pleasure of meeting *you* at Lady Coleraine's, Miss Fielding?" inquired Fitzosborne, whilst joy danced in his eyes.

"I believe Lady Harriet intends going," replied Julia.

"My dear Julia, you must learn the difficult lesson to say yes," rejoined Lady Harriet archly. "Let me answer for her, Mr. Fitzosborne; I know she means an affirmative."

Fitzosborne laughed triumphantly as he looked at Lady Matilda, who, rising with somewhat of more than usual haughtiness, took leave of Lady Harriet, and holding out her hand to Julia, bade her good bye; adding, under her breath, but with emphasis, "I see plainly how your engagements stand. But when you have time to remember 'auld lang syne,' think of us likewise."

Lord Alton gave his arm to Lady Matilda, as she went down stairs, and Fitzosborne believed himself necessitated by the example to offer his to her sister. Fresh visitors arrived to engross Lady Harriet's attention; and Julia retired under the pretence of preparing for her drive, but in truth to ruminate on Lady Matilda's parting speech, which she at last translated as a reproach for their having been so little together the evening before at the Duchess of Chester's.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MARCHIONESS'S BALL.

Nor hoary hairs, nor rank, the dance withstand,
Each sinner takes a sister by the hand,
And in the gay contention all engage :—
Not soon such ballets shall be seen again.

SOTHEBY'S OBERON.

WHEN Fitzosborne went home that night to dress for Lady Coleraine's ball, the elation of triumph played in his smiles, and the fire of joy danced in his eyes. "Her refusal of me is coquetry—mere coquetry," thought he, as his mind still dwelt on Julia. If she did not really prefer me, why should Alton in so marked a manner favour my pretensions? it was but the

other day I considered even a mere formal introduction to him as beyond my hopes, and now he receives me in his house as if he had known me for years. And Lady Harriet too—the very woman whose jealousy I deprecated, and whose malice I most feared—even she, from mistaken selfishness, furthers my designs: and as to Calvert, what have I now to fear from him? A little more, and Julia will learn to detest him: and if he should at last condescend to renew his attentions, I have already prepared her to think his doing so will be only attributable to my influence; and perhaps she will, out of very resentment at his impertinence, only marry me the sooner. Diplomacy! Politics! what are your triumphs, in comparison of these! Lord Alton's niece—the loveliest, and probably the richest, woman in England—attached too to the very man whose towering prospects till now have shadowed mine. What wish will remain ungratified? what ambition unfulfilled? Yes, Julia, mine you shall be, unless the powers of destiny conspire against me. But this I swear,

and may my vow be registered in heaven,—whilst I have life, you never—never shall be Calvert's bride!"

As he said these words, he accidentally caught a glimpse of the moon-beams as they rested on the water in the Green Park, through which he was at the moment passing: it almost seemed as if his vows were heard, as he remembered the night when, returning from Broomhill, he had first whispered the same adjuration in the light of that planet which now shed an effulgence around him. Visions of joy seemed to sparkle in each ray; and his very figure appeared to dilate, whilst he stepped proudly on, as if in mastery of fate itself.

Meantime, the hours rolled away. The streets, which had been silent for the short respite that usually intervenes after the carriages have set down their owners to dinner, again began to echo to the momentarily increasing sounds of rolling wheels: here and there a distant rumbling noise was heard—first faintly, then increasing, then abruptly receding down some other

street. Then came the sharp quick trot—the sudden stop — the opening door as abruptly closed, and the renewed clattering of the horses' shoes, which so distinctly marks the equipages of rank. The reiterated stops at the different club-houses were now lost in the rapidly-increasing crowds that emerging from all directions were seen to track their way in light, as they swiftly crossed each other in their various roads to pleasure; till at length the thickly congregating mass had blocked up all the avenues to the Square in which Lady Coleraine's splendid ball was duly announced, by the long line of lighted windows, some half open at the top, and all emitting rays of brilliancy, as well as by the open doors crowded with footmen and constables, that formed a lane through which nearly all the rank, beauty, and fashion, which London could boast, was seen to pass and repass, as if in homage towards the dazzling temple to which this darkening vestibule gave entrance.

On that night, Julia's dress was a masterpiece of Madame R——'s taste; and so success-

ful had been the exertions of La Valée, that he was heard afterwards to say, that if he had not already been the first hair-dresser in London, he would have been content to have staked all his pretensions to that dignity on Miss Fielding's appearance. Nor was Lady Harriet's toilet less successful: the aids of art, and the splendour of jewels, shone in rivalry around her; and it was almost difficult to determine which was the most fascinating—her Ladyship, in all the refined elegance of "womanhood mature;" or Julia, radiant in the charms of youth and loveliness.

It would have been unnatural if no spark of vanity had lightened in Julia's eyes, as her glass reflected her almost faultless beauty; but if she mentally acknowledged that her uncle's kind encomiums were not totally undeserved, perhaps she, at the same time, proudly retorted those words of fire which Lord Calvert's hand had traced, and which, like the writing of Belshazzar's feast, seemed most present to her mind in the scenes of her greatest triumphs.

Fitzosborne had preceded, by some minutes,

their arrival at Lady Coleraine's. His glossy hair had never been so well parted on his polished brow — his flashing eye had never gleamed with prouder joy, as he stood in one of the outer rooms waiting their entrance, one of the happiest, as one of the handsomest of the throng.

Several other men had also taken their station in that apartment—for Lady Coleraine's rooms were just beginning to fill; and it happened to be the whim of that evening, for the exquisites to withhold their presence at the opening scene.

Lord Calvert was lounging on a sofa, talking to Mr. Russel: Lord Oporto was yawning, and taking snuff at intervals: the Duke of Durham was arguing the merits of his favourite black mare with another gentleman, who proved himself *du premier ton* by the enormous whiskers that met under his chin, and the extraordinary dimensions of his waist as it appeared girt in by the lower button of his dark blue coat: whilst Lionel, at the other end of the room, was engaged, in another group, giving his "little senate laws,"

when the Marchioness of Coleraine swam into the room, covered with rouge and blonde, and diamonds, exclaiming, with her half-lisp of good-natured smile, "What are you all about here?—I want another quadrille in the third room.—Who will dance with Lady Charlotte Hargrove for me—who bids?—going—going."

"Not I, 'faith, gentle mother mine," replied Lord Oporto; "my duty is done for to-night—it's quite too hot to dance."

A smart slap of her Indian fan was the punishment bestowed by the Marchioness on her recreant son, as she turned away from him, saying, "Well, Duke, do take compassion on me, and let me introduce you to her."

"'Pon honour, my dear good lady,—I—I—I—am very sorry, but I am engaged."

"Well then, for pity's sake, take out your partner; I only want two couple—where is she?"

"She is not come yet; I am waiting for Lady Harriet Moreton's pretty cousin—I forget her name."

"Well, if you will only, like a dear good soul, dance this set with poor Lady Charlotte, I pro-

mise and vow to keep Miss Fielding for you for the next—*va-t'-en donc.*" And the Duke scarcely knowing which was least trouble, to refuse or to obey, sauntered out of one door, just as Lady Harriet and Julia, attended by Lord Alton, made their appearance at the other: they were immediately accosted by their lively hostess—

"Well, here you are at last, I declare—*et belles comme des anges!* My dear Miss Fielding, the poor Duke of Durham has been waiting for you these two hours; and I have just sent him off, *bon gré malgré,* to keep himself in exercise till you came. Now it would be delightful to send you in directly after him, and to dance *vis-à-vis.*—Charming! — here, Calvert — *presto* — *prestissimo.* — Miss Fielding, Lord Calvert — decidedly the best dancer in Paris—make haste —don't stop to talk now—you can do all that afterwards—mind, the third room," added she, calling them, and then humming—

Car elle est la plus belle,
Et toi le plus galant.

"I declare, mamma, you are the most positive, and at the same time the most provoking of your sex; why did not you keep Miss Fielding for me?" drawled out Lord Oporto, as he deliberately rose, and taking one finger of Lady Harriet's hand, shook it up and down in the same regular motion, as that of the pendulum of a French clock.

"To punish you for your undutifulness. But now, my dear Lord," continued she, addressing Lord Alton, "do sit down here, and let me say three words to you about my canal; I assure you it has every thing to recommend it.—Dear me, I must just go to speak one sentence to the Duchess of Durham:—poor dear Dowager, she wants to get another young lady to bring out now that Miss Green is off, and I have heard of a family I think would answer:—excuse me, my Lord, I will be back in a moment. *Et tu, Brute!*" continued she, as she passed Lionel, who had joined Lady Harriet. Meanwhile, the prudent Earl was too wise to take her Ladyship at her word, and wait for her being back

in a moment; and it was fortunate he did not do so, as the Marchioness never recollected her canal till she next saw his Lordship, which was not till they were going in to supper.

Lady Coleraine's rooms, though what she called only "just filling," were so crowded, that Julia and Lord Calvert could scarcely pass through to the prescribed "third room." Perhaps it was the pressure of the crowd that caused Lord Calvert to draw closer to his side the trembling hand that rested on his arm:—perhaps it was the heat, or the praises of her own beauty which she heard on every side, that gave to Julia's complexion that varying tint which made her loveliness still lovelier. But still on they passed in silence, each so much engrossed by their own thoughts, that they had not leisure to wonder at the attraction of the other.

They reached the set just in time to take their places, as Lady Coleraine predicted, opposite to the Duke and Lady Charlotte. "Now," thought Lord Calvert, "I will at least satisfy myself as to what she meant by her haughty sa-

lutation of me last night;" and "now," thought Julia, "I shall have an opportunity of proving to him that my indifference at least is equal to his own:" at least, if thoughts may be defined by subsequent actions, such was the tenor of their mutual reflections.

But of all antidotes to conversation, a French *contredanse* is decidedly the most invincible. Julia's dancing abilities were instantly put to the test, as she and Lady Charlotte were *les premières dames:* and before their turn of respite arrived, a group of spectators crowded round their quadrille, amongst whom Julia almost intuitively felt, rather than saw, the dark eyes of Fitzosborne fixed steadfastly on hers.

"Have you been long in town?" were the first words which Lord Calvert found courage to utter. It was long since Julia had heard his voice; and if now, even in this insignificant sentence, its tones were even more confiding, if possible, than ever, she might too have almost perceived a tremulousness, far different from their usual vivacious exhilaration.

"About three weeks," was her cold and even haughty reply; for as she said this, she looked with calm self-possession in Lord Calvert's face, conscious that hers was at that moment an object of scrutiny to Lionel.

"I had no idea that I should have had the pleasure of meeting you in London."

"You have been abroad I believe, but I forget where," added she, lest he should suppose that she now as formerly calendared his every movement; and whilst she said so, she gave her hand to the Duke, whose part was now to turn her in the dance, and to whose request of being his partner in the next quadrille, she assented with an animated smile.

"Incomprehensible girl!" exclaimed Lord Calvert almost aloud, as he watched her taking her place opposite to him, and near Fitzosborne, whose dark head he instantly saw stooped down to whisper to her.

"At least, Miss Fielding, I may claim the merit of consistency. Though I must envy—you see at least I yield."

Julia blushed, and fanned herself in agitation, which was not decreased by Lord Calvert's observation of it.

"I must put an end to this suspense," thought Lord Calvert as he again took his station at her side, and turning to her, abruptly asked, "Are you ever at home in a morning, Miss Fielding? or rather, may I ever hope to be admitted?"

"I am at present staying with Lady Harriet Moreton, and I really do not know what her rules are as to visitors in general."

"Did you go out soon after I left you this morning?" said Fitzosborne. "I am afraid my visit was of an unconscionable length."

"We only drove to the Park," replied Julia as she again mixed in the dance.

"Are you engaged for the next waltz?" whispered Lord Oporto as soon as she was at leisure to attend to him. She answered by professing that she never waltzed.

"Calvert, is not that incredible? Miss

Fielding declares she never waltzes? do you believe her?"

"I am bound to believe all Miss Fielding says, however difficult it may be to understand her," replied Lord Calvert; for even the feelings of mortification now gave way to those of irritated pride, as he found himself, as he considered, excluded when Lionel was admitted to her morning *levée*.

"Then if you will not waltz with me, what quadrille will you dance with me? for I will not be refused every thing."

Julia mentioned that the Duke of Durham was her only engagement.

"Except with me, Miss Fielding?" said Fitzosborne, in a style half of entreaty and half of gaiety.

"We all know *your* engagements with Miss Fielding, my good fellow," said Lord Oporto in a half whisper, which, however, Lord Calvert overheard.

"Yes, and of course resign our own pretensions," said his Lordship in pique which he could scarcely repress. The dance was over, and as he

made his bow to Julia, she caught the last sentence, and considered the words and the action as commentaries on each other.

Lady Harriet Moreton was beside her, and in a few moments they formed the centre of a little circle.

"How do, Lady Harriet?" said Lady Hauteville. "Will you introduce me to Miss Fielding?—Are you fond of dancing?"

Julia answered in the affirmative; but before she could finish her short sentence, she was interrupted by Mr. Jessop—

"I can, at least, answer for Miss Fielding's fondness for music."

"And I am quite willing, henceforward, to believe all you say, or ever said, about Miss Fielding," rejoined the Viscountess with a good-natured smile, which gave Julia the idea that some covert compliment was intended.

"*A propos* of music, how did you like La Montalvina's singing last night?" inquired Lady Harriet.

"It had much more pretension than exe-

cution, in my opinion," replied Lady Hauteville; "but then you know she is so handsome, it is the fashion to admire every thing she does."

"How remarkably well she looks to-night!" rejoined Lady Harriet. "I see she has stood up to waltz with Lord Calvert—let us draw back a little, and we shall see them better."

In this move, Julia once more found herself next to Fitzosborne; he again approached her, and again whispered in his soft, emphatic voice, as he looked towards Lord Calvert, who now stood with his arm round the Countess's waist, preparatory to their waltz—"'The good we have, we prize not to its worth.' How little do *I* admire Lord Calvert's choice!"

"You knew the Countess Montalvina in Italy?" said Julia with a momentary curiosity she could not repress.

"Yes, too well to admire her; it is only when domestic virtue is added to talents that *I* can prize them."

"Alas!" thought Julia, "I once believed that too was Lord Calvert's creed:" but her

thoughts were interrupted, if not diverted, by Lord Oporto, who seemed unusually anxious to cultivate Miss Fielding's acquaintance.

"Do you ever ride? have you any horses in town?" Julia answered, that though very fond of riding, she never had thought of going on horseback in London.

"You are quite wrong there—every woman rides in town now; you may meet old Lady Mary Watkins every day as large as life, on a blood horse that is as tall as her Ladyship's grandson."

"If you would like to ride, Miss Fielding, I can offer you a capital horse," said Mr. Jessop.

Julia declined his politeness. "Has he ever carried petticoats?" said Lord Oporto; "Lady Charlotte Hargrove has desired me to look out for one for her, and if you like, Jessop, you may take the trouble off my hands."

"And the lady too?" whispered Mr. Jessop.

"The waltz is over at last," said the Duke of Durham, coming to claim Julia as his

partner; "shall we stand here or go into another room? the one next the conservatory is coolest."

Julia preferred it, simply because she hoped it would take her further from Lord Calvert; and thither she and the Duke proceeded.

"Devilish handsome, 'pon my honour," observed Lord Oporto to Mr. Jessop, looking after them; "How much has she?"

"Twenty thousand at least," replied the Dragoon.

"Hang those Tralees! they are sure to pick up crumbs every where; it runs in the family. I suppose it's all fixed with Fitzosborne—lucky fellow!—I should'nt mind cutting him out myself."

"Cut out Fitzosborne! it would be much easier to cut aces seven times running."

"If you will lay me any thing worth trying for, I'll do it for fun."

"Done—any odds you please."

"Here, Calvert, will you hold the stakes?" and poor Lord Calvert underwent the martyrdom of hearing the whole bet detailed.

Meantime Lady Harriet Moreton and Lady Hauteville had moved to a distant part of the room, to where the Duchess of Chester had just made her appearance, attended by a group of beaux, of whom her favourite Mr. Russel was one. No sooner did the old Marquis perceive her Grace, than, bustling up to her, a welcome in his smile, and a ready-made impromptu on his lips, he called out to her from a distance, "My dear Duchess, that room is quite too hot for you; you'll die there, 'albeit unused to the melting mood.' Do come into the conservatory; you will see from that the prettiest girl in the room: your Grace and her should be together."

"Positively, my dear Lord, you are insufferable; *ces calembourgs-là sont horribles. Ah! Madame Hervey, comment va-t-elle?*"

"Mais, ma belle dame, c'est fini; je me meurs, je n'en puis plus."

"Qu'avez-vous donc?" inquired the Duchess, almost alarmed at her melancholy countenance.

"Regardez ma robe—je suis chiffonnée à la

mort, il y a une telle presse pour voir cette demoiselle—Field—Field—ah! je ne connois pas son nom, mais c'est quelque mot qui veut dire *champêtre*."

"If you mean Miss Fielding," interrupted Lady Charlotte Hargrove, "I do not think she is at all worth the fuss that is made about her. La! Lady Harriet, I beg your pardon: I really quite forgot I was speaking of your cousin."

"Lady Harriet will forgive *you*, I am sure, and me too, I hope, when I say I think her quite beautiful:—and now do tell me, Lord Calvert, all about her. She is a near neighbour of yours in the country, is she not?" continued her Grace, as her Ladyship just then joined them.

"Mr. Fielding lives very near Ellesmere, but I have been very little in that neighbourhood lately."

"I ought to have remembered you were one of us travellers," replied her Grace, who now launched out upon her favourite theme.

"Dear me, there are those eternal Tralees," exclaimed Lady Hauteville; and then

turning round, she received them most condescendingly.

"I was very sorry not to find your Ladyship at home when I called," said Lady Tralee to Lady Harriet Moreton. "I wished to thank you for all the trouble you took about Mrs. Smith."

"I am very glad to hear she suits you so well. Is she still with you?"

"She is at Elm Park: her health would not allow of her coming to town with us—and I was rather glad of an opportunity of leaving my youngest daughter in the country also."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Lady Harriet, who had not heard one word Lady Tralee had been saying; and therefore had not a guess what she was to be delighted about.

"I see a press towards that door, Duchess; I fancy supper is coming—," observed Lady Hauteville, not sorry to make her escape from the two Misses Fitzosborne, who looked as if they were composing something to say to her.

The Duchess took the hint and Lord Coleraine's arm at the same time. Lord Calvert gave his to Lady Hauteville, whilst Lady Harriet took that of Mr. Jessop. As the opposing currents met, Lord Calvert perceived Julia leaning on Fitzosborne, endeavouring to make their way towards Lady Harriet Moreton. And at the same moment, he fortunately descried another supper-room opening in a contrary direction, towards which he impelled, rather than guided, Lady Hauteville; as he asserted he saw Miss Flinn and Lord Oporto pass that way—and he always recommended the table his Lordship patronised.

Julia saw no more of Lord Calvert that evening. She had partners for more sets than she could dance, and she danced more sets than she would have liked—till at last the morning sun broke through the hastily closed curtains; his stray beam fell on many a painted cheek and faded finery; and it was bright daylight when she and Lady Harriet got into the carriage, tired, heated, and dispirited. "Is this," thought Julia, "a fair specimen of Lon-

don pleasures? When shall I again see the morning dawn on my flowers at the rectory? and when shall I again enjoy its brightness, as happy as I once have been?"

The *finale* of Lady Coleraine's magnificent entertainment cannot better be expressed, than in the words of the illustrious Lord Brook:—

> But let them part—and pass in God his name.
> God speed them well, I pray, and me no worse:
> Some are gone home, with dancing almost lame,
> And some go light, by means of empty purse:
> And, to be short, home goeth every one,
> And home go I unto my lodge alone.

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY A. J. VALPY, RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

This book is given special protection for the reason indicated below:

Autograph	Giftbook
Association	Illustration
Condition	Miniature book
Cost	✓Original binding or covers
Edition	Presentation
Fine binding	Scarcity
Format	Subject

L82—5M—1-52—49125

ms